

## THE GHOST OF MADAM CROWL

Twenty years have passed since you last saw Mrs. Jolliffe's tall slim figure. She is now past seventy, and can't have many milestones more to count on the journey that will bring her to her long home. The hair has grown white as snow, that is parted under her cap, over her shrewd, but kindly face. But her figure is still straight, and her step light and active.

She has taken of late years to the care of adult invalids, having surrendered to younger hands the little people who inhabit cradles, and crawl on all-fours. Those who remember that goodnatured face among the earliest that emerge from the darkness of nonentity, and who owe to their first lessons in the accomplishment of walking, and a delighted appreciation of their first babblings and earliest teeth, have "spired up" into tall lads and lasses, now. Some of them shew streaks of white by this time, in brown locks, "the bonny gouden" hair, that she was so proud to brush and shew to admiring mothers, who are seen no more on the green of Golden Friars, and whose names are traced now on the flat grey stones in the churchyard.

So the time is ripening some, and searing others; and the saddening and tender sunset hour has come; and it is evening with the kind old north-country dame, who nursed pretty Laura Mildmay, who now stepping into the room, smiles so gladly, and throws her arms round the old woman's neck, and kisses her twice.

"Now, this is so lucky!" said Mrs. Jenner, "you have just come in time to hear a story."

"Really! That's delightful."

"Na, na, od wite it! no story, ouer true for that, I sid it a wi my aan eyen. But the barn here, would not like, at these hours, just goin' to her bed, to hear tell of freets and boggarts."

"Ghosts? The very thing of all others I should most likely to hear of."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Jenner, "if you are not afraid, sit ye down here, with us."

"She was just going to tell me all about her first engagement to attend a dying old woman," says Mrs. Jenner, "and of the ghost she saw there. Now, Mrs. Jolliffe, make your tea first, and then begin."

The good woman obeyed, and having prepared a cup of that companionable nectar, she sipped a little, drew her brows slightly together to collect her thoughts, and then looked up with a wondrous solemn face to begin.

Good Mrs. Jenner, and the pretty girl, each gazed with eyes of solemn expectation in the face of the old woman, who seemed to gather awe from the recollections she was summoning.

The old room was a good scene for such a narrative, with the oak-wainscoting, quaint, and clumsy furniture, the heavy beams that crossed its ceiling, and the tall four-post bed, with dark curtains, within which you might imagine what shadows you please.

Mrs. Jolliffe cleared her voice, rolled her eyes slowly round, and began her tale in these words: —

### MADAM CROWL'S GHOST

"I'm an ald woman now, and I was but thirteen, my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o' one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe waitin' to take me and my box up to Applewale.

"I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the 'shay' — that's what we used to call it — and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a goodnatured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt's room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night, and I eat the apples, lookin' out o' the shay winda.

"It's a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on 'em on the tap o' the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"'Ho, then,' says one of them, 'you'll not be long there!'

"And I looked at him as much as to say 'Why not?' for I had spoken out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I hed to say.

"'Because,' says he, 'and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see — she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?'

"'Yes, sir,' says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the print's too small for my ald eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

"As I looked up at him saying 'Yes, sir,' I thought I saw him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"'Well,' says he, 'be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the ald girl's claws aff ye.'

"And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the ald lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consarns, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heart sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stand very thick and big, as ald as the ald house almost, and four people, with their arms out and fingertips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

"Well my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the first view o' the great house; and all at once we pulled up in front of it.

"A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down in front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulded across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t' rooms was locked up.

"My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this the great house afoore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl, that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

"My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

"The squire — his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson — came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applegate House.

"I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding; but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

"Mrs. Wyvern — Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me — was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always goodhumoured and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

"She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was goodhumoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and, seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt — children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story — though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

"My aunt took me into her bedchamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first, she patted me on the shoulder, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father, her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids (would not do anything of that sort).

"It was a hard sayin' the first time I set foot in her room, I thought.

"When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room — very comfortable, yak (oak) all round — there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

"While I was still at my tea my aunt went upstairs to see Madam Crowl.

"She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake," says Mrs. Wyvern. "Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters — that was my aunt's name — 'is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out o' t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be."

"How old, ma'am?" says I.

"Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone," says she; and she laughed. "And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt — mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all."

"And what's to be my business about her, please, ma'am?" says I.

"About the old lady? Well," says she, "your aunt, Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome."

"Is she deaf, ma'am?"

"No, nor blind," says she; "as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the king's court, or the affairs of the nation."

"And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go."

"Yes; she's gone."

"What for?" says I again.

"She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose," says she. "I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child."

"And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?" says I.

"It ain't no harm to ask that," says she. "She's torflin a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage."

"In comes my aunt, and begins talkin' to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bedpost hangin' up inside.

"What's that you're at, child?" says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. "What's that in your hand?"

"This, ma'am?" says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. "I don't know what it is, ma'am."

"Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gev me a sizzup. But she did gie me a shake by the shoulder, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, "While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye", and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi' a bang and locked it fast.

"Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly, in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

"The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', "Tut, the child meant no harm — come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed."

"My room, mind ye, was upstairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room, and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

"The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and at other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said,

in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was oldfashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

"Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

"There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

"The doctor came twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

"So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

"I would a liked to see the ald lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a' bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

"When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the ald lady talking.

"It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had a bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

"I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits."

"Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

"And my aunt med answer again: 'Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?'

"I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old Aesop's Fables, I was aware o' something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"Hish!" says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: 'Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i' noo — me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she'll be sleepin' in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room.'

"And with that she goes.

"I kep' looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin' every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an' I began whisperin' to the pictures and talkin' to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin' feared in that big room.

"And at last up I got, and began walkin' about the room, lookin' at this and peepin' at that, to amuse my mind, ye'll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madam Crowl's bedchamber.

"A grand chamber it was, wi' a great four-poster, wi' flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin', and foldin' down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin'-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o' light. I counted twenty-two wax candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

"I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, 'Why couldn't I ha' a keek at the ald lady herself in the bed?'

"Ye'd think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn't peep now I might wait many a day before I got so gude a chance again.

"Well, my dear, I came to the side o' the bed, the curtains bein' close, and my heart a'most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly I draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-steane in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! 'twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o' her head, and, wow! — was ever such wrinkles? — and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and there she lay proud and stark, wi' a pair o' clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as ninepins. Lawk! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o' her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin' and dribblin' before the lookin'-glass, wi' a fan in her hand and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it even a bin the fashion for grit fowk to wear their fingernails so?'

"Well, I think ye'd a-bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, nor take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

"Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfulest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!'

"If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

"I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

"I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the ald lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

"I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heard the ald lady's words.

"Say them again,' says she.

"So I told her.

"Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff.'

"And did ye say she killed a boy?' says she.

"Not I, ma'am,' says I.

"Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two elder women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi' her.

"It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crawl that I did not know before.

"She being young and a great beauty, full seventy year before, had married Squire Crawl, of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine years old.

"There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one mornin'. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper's cottage and breakfast wi' him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening; and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin' there, or paddlin' about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi' him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathorn that grows thar to this day, and 'twas thought he was drowned bathin'. And the squire's son, by his second marriage, with this Madam Crawl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in far the estates. It was his son, the ald lady's grandson, Squire Chevenix Crawl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

"There was a deal o' talk lang before my aunt's time about it; and 'twas said the stepmother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the ald squire, wi' her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks' minds.

"I'm goin' to tell ye noo about what I sid wi' my own een.

"I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the ald lady took her last sickness.

"The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o' madness, as she did fifteen years befoore, and was buckled up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin I sid in the closet, off my aunt's room.

"Well, she didn't. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin', torflin', quiet enough, till a day or two before her flittin', and then she took to rabblin', and sometimes skirlin' in the bed, ye'd think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o' the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she'd fall on the flure, wi' her ald wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin' still for mercy.

"Ye may guess I didn't go into the room, and I used to be shiverin' in my bed wi' fear, at her skirlin' and scrafflin' on the flure, and blarin' out words that id make your skin turn blue.

"My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

"T' sir was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin', and a' was over, and old Dame Crawl was shrouded and confined, and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t' sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o' her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o' us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin'. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

"I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crawl's chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

"The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi' yak pannels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so, that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na mair o' that wark, was put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin' o' many things in her chamber ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

"The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin' of a' at hame, and my sister Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn't sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

"Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin' on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o' the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin' from the wall, was dancin' up and down on the ceilin' beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head ower my shoulder quick, thinkin' something must a gone a' fire.

"And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o' the ald beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin', wi' her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. 'Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin'. She was drivin' on right for me, wi' her ald shrivelled hands crooked as if she was goin' to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi' a blast o' cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in ald times wi' a door open wide, and her hands gropin' in at somethin' was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyrin', and all at once the room was dark, and I standin' at the far side o' the bed; I don't know how I got there, and I found my tongue at

last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin' down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern's door off t' hooks, and frighted her half out o' wits.

"Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi' the first light, down wi' me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

"Well my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

"Hed the appearance a key in its hand?"

"Yes," says I, bringin' it to mind, 'a big key in a queer brass handle.'

"Stop a bit," says she, lettin' go ma hand, and openin' the cupboard-door. 'Was it like this?' says she, takin' one out in her fingers, and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

"That was it," says I, quick enough.

"Are ye sure?" she says, turnin' it round.

"Sart," says I, and I felt like I was gain' to faint when I sid it.

"Well, that will do, child," says she, saftly thinkin', and she locked it up again.

"The squire himself will be here today, before twelve o'clock, and ye must tell him all about it," says she, thinkin', 'and I suppose I'll be leavin' soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can.'

"Fain was I, ye may guess, at that word.

"My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crawl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years ald. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

"My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I darn't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there's na sic a thing as a bo or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye down and tell all about it from first to last.'

"Well, so soon as I made an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"I mind the place well. In old Sir Olivur's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he told me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot.'

"Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

"There was an ald empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"Ha!" says he, wi' a queer smile, 'this looks like it.'

"It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang skreak, the boul went back and he pulled the door open.

"There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

"When my aunt had lighted the candle, the squire held it up and stept in.

"My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"Ha! ha!" says the squire, steppin' backward. 'What's that? Gi' ma the poker — quick!' says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened ald wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"By Jen!" says my aunt, as puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, 'hae a care, sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!'

"But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a sword, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

"'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull, as it lay on the floor.

"Young as I was, I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"A dead cat!" says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. 'We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present,' says he, pattin' my shouther wi' his hand.

"And he did gimma a goud pound and I went aff to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stagecoach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I never sid Dame Crawl o' Applewale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-efter. But when I was grown to be a woman, my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was no doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen, that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin' cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water's edge, whoever did it, to mak' belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a' ran into a snuff o' dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o' jet buttons, and a knife with a green heft, together wi' a couple o' pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o' the light. And there was, among the squire's papers, a copy o' the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the ald squire thought he might 'a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi' him, and that his buttons were o' cut jet. Sa that is a' I hev to say consarnin' ald Dame Crawl, o' Applewale House."

## THE CHRONICLES OF GOLDEN FRIARS

### A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE LIFE OF MISS LAURA MILD MAY

#### CHAPTER I.

##### NEWS FROM HILERIA PULLEN.

OUTSIDE, the moon is shining over a solemn winter landscape. Towering mountains, with their bases so near the foreground that you can see the rude fences and solitary trees that mark them, rise wilder and bolder into snowy altitudes, above which, in the deep blue of night, the stars are twinkling frostily. Dropped here suddenly, you might think yourself in a Swiss valley. But the character of the little village that stands by the margin of the lake, though in some respects singular, and altogether quaint, is decidedly English. This scene lies in the North of England. The village is called Golden Friars; and the grey stone house, with the piers, and the shadow of the sombre elms, that stands within a stone's throw of the village churchyard, is the vicar's ancient dwelling. In wintry weather — in the long nights — every room looks cheery that glows with a mixture of firelight and candles. The curtains were drawn on the narrow windows; and the flicker of that warm light showed very pleasantly on walls varied with press and cupboard, and with some old-fashioned bookshelves, well stored with volumes, and visited the portrait of the vicar's grandfather, who, having been a doctor of laws near a hundred years ago at Oxford, was taken in his red hood, which glowed grandly out from the shadow, and helped to light up the homely chamber. The Vicar of Golden Friars was a natty man, and the soul of punctuality. His sermons were all written on Thursday afternoon for delivery from the pulpit on the Sunday following. He had just completed one. The last page was open on the table; the light of the candle was glittering from the still wet ink. The vicar, as he leaned back in his chair with his fingers interlaced, and the tips of his thumbs together, looked down, sidelong, on his performance with an air of complacency—not quite a smile, but very near it. The Reverend Hugh Jenner was, I must confess, conceited of his sermons. As he looked, the horn of the mail-coach, driving through the High Street, sounded clear in the frosty air, as it were, a little flourish of triumph not inappropriate. His good wife was working at her *broderie anglaise*, at the other side of the fire. She was absorbed apparently in it, really in a rumination; and, as people will under the circumstances, she gazed upon her work with dull and gloating eyes, and lips pursed, and forgot next Sunday's sermon, the husband of her bosom, and the little dog that slept in a basket on a cushion at her feet. Once or twice Doctor Jenner stole a glance at his wife, expecting the good woman, after her wont, to inquire how the sermon pleased him, what was the subject, and so forth. I think, if she had owned a nursery duly stocked, or had ever had such a pleasant and anxious little colony to look after, she might not have cared quite so much for the sermon, and someone else would have stitched them into their purple paper covers. People are never, of course, quite content with the thing that is. Nature hides away the ugliness of decay, disease, and death. There is, if we could fathom it, a profound mystery in the fact that man anticipates good from every change; and that the pain that belongs to every imaginable situation is hidden from all but those who suffer it. I think that these two people, living in the quaint grey house, with the tall piers, capped with stone balls, in front, between which swung the iron gate, flanked without by clumps of lofty elms, were possibly a happier pair than if they had obtained the wish of their hearts — a hope they had long ceased to cherish — a little child to look in their faces, and prattle and play about the trim, quiet rooms. Well, they had been twenty years married, and were childless. And, as it turned out, by an odd coincidence — for it chimed in with her own thoughts at the moment — the vicar, who had now risen, and was standing with his back to the fire, said at last—

"I have finished the sermon, my love; and it treats a good deal of the case of Elkanah and Hannah."

"How very odd!" said Mrs. Jenner; "I can't account for it."

"For what, Dolly?" inquired the vicar.

"I dreamed last night that we had such a darling little child."

I thought it lay sleeping, poor little thing! on my knees; and that while I was looking at it, you were reading aloud such a beautiful sermon about Hannah and Elkanah; and here it is — the very subject! And, oddly enough, I was thinking of it at the very moment!"

"Very odd, my dear!" said the vicar — "very odd!"

And he stepped over to her side, smiling, and kissed her cheek gently, and patting it, smiled still with great affection upon her, saying —

"Dolly, my darling, we must not fret about the matter. Let us leave all in the hands of God, Who has given us one another, and this quiet and happy life. Remember the kind reproach of Elkanah to his beloved wife: 'Am not I better to thee than ten sons?' There is some good reason, or the God of all comfort would not deny us this. And is there not compensation? For my part, Dolly, when I look at you I feel that I already owe more love on earth than I can ever repay."

So they kissed very tenderly, and she said —

"I'm sure it is true. But I don't repine; you must not fancy that. It is only when my darling man is out, making his visits, that I do sometimes feel lonely, and think that if I had a little creature to play with—"

"Little creature to play with, my dear? It might be a young man of twenty by this time," said the vicar.

"I don't see why it should," expostulated his wife. "But I can't help wishing; and I know it would be delightful if a kind fairy would come, as happens in the old fairy-tale, and give us our wish, and a pretty present for the little creature at its christening."

At this moment the door opened, and the maid entered with a letter.

It had the postmark. It had just arrived by the coach. It was for the vicar.

"What an odd hand! Who is it?"

The vicar had replaced his spectacles, and was standing with his side to the candle, and the letter open in his fingers. He had just begun to read it, but rumbled it round, to read the signature for his wife.

"Hilaria Pullen."

"What an odd name!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenner.

"Yes," said the vicar, "it is odd. Hilaria one could have understood; but Hilaria — it is odd; it is barbarous. I never heard of the person. I don't think I ever knew any one of that name. Pullen? No."

"What is the postmark?" asked his wife curiously.

"Guildford, Surrey," he answered. "I don't know a soul who lives there."

He drew nearer to the candle, and read for a few seconds undisturbed.

"Aren't there some people related to you called Torquil?" he asked.

"Yes, my second cousin, Janet Ayger married a Captain Torquil," answered Dolly.

"Well — yes. Listen to this," said the vicar. "Shall I read it aloud for you, as well as I can?"

"Do, like a darling," said she, and the vicar began.

"It is rather long, and I have only read a little way."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VICAR AND HIS WIFE ARE ADJURED.

THE letter began thus: —

‘REVEREND SIR, — Please your divine, I am the woman by name Hileria Pullen, who cares the dearling child resently left an orphen by that angle of goodness the deseased Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen’s Snedley, and which I do suppose was well known to you and your lady, if she be still living; and Mr. Mildmay, whose lamentable departure likewise you saw, from a fall from his gig being in the papers — and the horse ran away, which caused his lamentable departure, a year before my mistress that was. Leaving her and her dearling infent, only eight months old, to lament his departure.’

“These people are all new to me,” said the vicar, shaking his head a little, and lowering the letter to the table, as he looked on his wife.

“Yes; that’s poor Alice. She married Mr. Mildmay, of Queen’s Snedley. I thought she took airs a little, and we have not written to one another this long time. Perhaps I wronged her; and so she’s gone, poor thing.”

“And he also died, it seems, a year before; and this is the nurse, I suppose,” said the vicar.

The vicar resumed:

“Two days after my lamentable mistress died, Captain Torquil came to Queen’s Snedley, having given an order to Floss and Company for the funeral, which was done private. He has took the child and me to Guildford, where it and me at this present time is. We are comfortable in every particular as yet. Mrs. Torquil is here herself, but is not happy, nor, I think, in ‘ealth, to make it sootable for Miss Mildmay when she comes to grow up a bit to stay here, even if the captain was a saint upon earth — which it is far from so. Because, as I can make plain, I am very Unhappy about the dear child. He comes down here from London, sometimes every day for a bit, and sometimes he will not come for a week. Mrs. Torquil says she is a relative of your lady, and asked me after her very kindly, if she be still living, which I cannot tell, not having knewed the name.’

“That’s true, isn’t it?” asked the vicar. “They are related?”

“Yes, she is a cousin — not a first cousin — and I never saw very much of her. But go on, dear.”

“Well-yes. Where was I? Oh! here.”

And the vicar continued, thus:

“But I am very anxious, please your divine, on account of the darling baby, you are aware it is only eighteen months old on the seventh of December last, and there is a many things you should know about; there being no near relative, and me in very great fear for the consequences. The captain is a pillite gentleman, and nice spoken to me. But I cannot write to your divine the cause of me being so very frightened as I am. For the captain he has been very kind to me, and I have nothing to complain. But has come to the nursery frequently, and looks at the child, and always offers me a drink, which is not the place of a gentleman to such as me; and having charge of the dearling child to offer me a drink, and press me to take it as he does.’

“Very odd, indeed,” said Mrs. Jenner. “I wonder what aged person this is?”

“I haven’t a notion, my dear,” answered the vicar.

“But what can he mean by it?” repeated his wife, with dignity.

“It is possibly mere good nature,” said her husband.

“I hope so,” said Mrs. Jenner. “I don’t think it gentlemanlike.”

“She may be an old woman, you know,” said the vicar.

“Extremely unlikely,” said the good lady, with an offended air. “You may as well read on, Hugh.”

The vicar read on therefore:

‘Being myself a many a year in the world, and having seen a great deal— ‘

“Oh! then she *is* a person of a certain age,” said the vicar.

“I’m glad she is. She’s the fitter person to take charge of children,” said his wife. “But I never heard any good of that Captain Torquil, and, Heaven forgive me if I wrong him, I don’t believe any; and I don’t say so without having heard a good deal about him. But read on, darling.”

“Very good,” said the vicar. “I wonder what on earth she can want of me? however, we’ll see,” and he read on:

‘It seems to me the captain wants to take the management of the dearling baby out of my hands hole us bole us.’



“She spells very oddly,” said the vicar.  
“Never mind. What more, darling?” said Mrs. Jenner.

‘And the notions of such a thing puts me to my wits end, and, ‘indeed, God alone is my chief hope.’

“That, under all circumstances, I trust,” interpolated the vicar.

‘And I would wash my hands of it, and leave the place, was it not for that dearling baby, and the dreadful sin which it would lay on my soul — which the Lord forbid — and what may become of it I know not, if you will not see fit to come here and remove the poor little dearling. It will not do to write to me here, for it will fall, most likely, into the hands of the captain, which it would be a great break up, and the undoing of me; for he is, I hear, a very violent gentleman when he is crossed, and I should then be quite heartbroke about the dearling baby, for it would pass altogether into other hands, and so God only knows the consequence; and you being a parson, and acquainted with all goodness, will know what is right to be done by the poor innocent, and your own kin, and a great sin ‘twill be if you let the child come to evil. Great Heaven, if you but knew the awful state I am in this hour, and the baby, poor innocent darling, in so great a danger, you would not fail to take coach for here — Guildford, Surrey, Old Hall, at the grocer’s in High Street, Samuel Folder’s, they will tell you of me; and as you hope for mercy yourself, come here and take away the child to stay in safety in your care.’

That was the end of the letter; and when he had read it, he lowered it again to the table, and looked in his wife’s face, and she looked in his.

## CHAPTER III.

### VOICES IN THE HALL

"I DON'T see, my love, do you," said the vicar, "that I am called upon to take any step on this odd letter from a servant-maid?" "But, Hugh, dear, suppose she says true? Suppose there is a good reason for her alarm and urgency?"

"People of that rank of life don't understand ours. I don't believe, Dolly, there is any reason such as an educated person would act on."

"And — I was just thinking, Hugh — does not this offer, as it were, from Providence of a little child of our kindred to take in, and protect, and educate, and love, I might say, very wonderfully? It might be such a darling-just eighteen months old, and a little orphan, poor little thing; and it must be a darling little creature, or she could not love it so very much."

"But, my dear, the woman may be mad. If I could be certain there was anything in it — but I don't even understand what she means."

"Don't you think she means that the child will be kidnapped, or made away with somehow?"

"Well, suppose she does, is it not more likely that a woman in her rank of life should be either stupid, or tipsy, or even mad, than that Captain — what's his name?-should meditate any such enormity?"

"But you told us, Hugh, last Sunday, in that beautiful sermon on the text, 'Search the Scriptures,' that that was the very argument-wasn't it? — by which that wicked man, Mr. Hume, attacked revealed religion."

"Very well argued, I allow, Dolly," said the vicar, smiling and patting her cheek affectionately.

"I am not sure, but I know it was something like it. And suppose, Hugh, dear, that anything bad did happen to the poor little child in consequence of your holding back and leaving it to its fate, would you ever forgive yourself? Think what a treasure it might be; and, oh, could you-could you feel quite happy if you resolve on leaving the poor little thing to take its chance after this warning?"

"I see, my good little Dolly, you have set your heart on our burning our fingers with other people's chestnuts," said the vicar, who secretly was more of his wife's way of feeling and thinking in the matter than he cared to avow; and even at the cost of the long journey—a longer one than the rail makes of it — he was very well disposed to be urged into the affair. "I see you have made up your mind, and I suppose, with such a termagant for a wife, I may as well make up mine," he continued merrily. "It would be odd, Dolly, if it turned out as you say, and supplied a little inmate for that one lonely nook in the house, the quiet room upstairs, that may be noisy enough yet. But you must give me time to arrange about my duty, and to speak to Stubbs and Mompesson. And you'll allow me to pack my trunk, also. I think you will? And so we'll see what's to be done, and should anything come of it, I may be delayed. I may be absent two Sundays; and, do you observe, the letter is stamped 'late.'"

I see the date corresponds. It has been a day longer making the journey than it ought; but that accounts for it. The last mail. They are so dilatory in that rank of life. Yes, we must reckon two Sundays' absence. If you look at the map he pointed to a large map of England hanging on the screen—"you'll see that it is a long way between this and Guildford."

By this time the vicar was a little fussed, and had begun to feel the distraction of the coming journey.

Dorothy had got Hileria Pullen's letter, and was reading it, over again.

"Well, darling, may God bless the undertaking," said the vicar, after a silence of some minutes, laying his hand kindly on his wife's shoulder. "But the more I think of it, the more I am satisfied we are right."

She looked up, meeting his fond glance as fondly.

"Yes, Hugh, it will be the longest separation we have had since we were married."

And these good people, who loved very fondly and kissed easily, kissed very tenderly again, and she laid her hand in his as he sat down by her side, and they looked with inexpressible affection and happiness in each other's faces. I wonder if it was possible for two human beings to be happier; and yet the wish of these hearts was still to seek-*quifit Mecaenas?*

As, hand locked in hand, they fell thus into a reverie, on a sudden the iron gate opened, a tramp of feet and the sound of voices reached the hall door, at which came a loud knock like a woundy pelt, as they say in that country, of a hammer. This was followed by a great peal of the bell, and was so startling that good Mrs. Jenner bounded with an ejaculation, and the vicar, holding his wife's hand tighter than he intended, looked round to the window.

There were several voices talking, and the bell rang again.

"Some one ill, I'm afraid," said the vicar, going to the head of the stairs to hurry the maid.

She was already at the door, and he heard feet entering, and some talk, and the deep bass voice of Tom Shackles among the rest.

"By the mess!" cried the lusty voice of the girl. "Here will be news for the master and mistress. In wi' it here. By Jen!"

The other voices meanwhile were talking loudly enough in the hall to make it no easy matter for the vicar, calling over the banister at the head of the stairs, to make himself heard.

"Fetch it in!"

Could it be some half-drowned body picked out of the lake, and brought in to recover or die, as God might please, in the vicar's house?

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN WHICH A PERSON COMES TO MAKE A VISIT TO THE VICARAGE.

THE talking in the hall continued, but Catherine Bell, the vicar's servant, ran upstairs, and seeing her master calling unheeded over the banister, she accosted him from the landing below in these words, with a delighted grin on her ruddy face —

"Oh, sir, beggin' yer pardon, please, there be a bam coom."

"A child come. What child? Whose child? What's the meaning of all this? Is that Tom Shackles I hear downstairs? Will you tell him to come up to the lobby? I shall never know what it is otherwise; and come yourself also."

And he put his head into the drawingroom and said, "Something that will interest you, my love. It never rains but it pours. A baby arrived, and coming up."

"Bring the child up with you; that is, if it is fit to come up, of course. How do you do, Shackles? Come up for a moment; we want to hear what it is."

"Here they come, dear," he said, returning to the drawingroom, where his wife was standing near the door in a high state of excitement.

"Is he coming?" she asked.

"I'll carry it. Gie't to me, Tom, will ye?" said Catherine Bell, in a giggle of ecstasy, coming up the stairs with the baby lying across in her arms, looking like a bale of flannels, with a tweed shawl folded round it, and some thick veils pinned over its face.

"Bring the darling here, near the candles," said kind Dolly Jenner to her maid. "Lay it on my lap."

"The bonny bab! it's sleepin', ma'am."

"Oh! the darling!" pursued the vicar's wife. "We must take care, Kitty, not to let the light on its eyes, the poor little thing!"

"'Twill be a bonny wee thing, I'll warrant ye, ma'am. Shall I unpin the clout from its face?"

"Do, Kitty, quickly," answered the lady, who was looking down on the lace veil — which indicated the rank of this little outcast's people — longing, if it were possible, to see through it to the little slumbering face that was hidden from her eager eyes.

While they were thus employed, the vicar talked with Tom Shackles near the door.

Tom was the parish clerk, and followed other callings too. A tall fellow, of a long and solemn face, with a somewhat golden tint, and thick blackhair streaked with white, and a verybluechin.

"As 'twas a matter for your reverence, they sent round the corner for me. You'd say the woman was dyin' a'most, and she calls for the sacrament. She's down at the George, they've got her to bed. She says there be them on her tracks that would hurt the child, and that's why she could not hold her peace till the babby was in charge o' your reverence. She asked was your wife living, and when she heard so, she took heart and thanked God, and cried a bit. She did not come by the mail-coach. She got out at Scardon Hall, and took a chaise across. She thinks she's followed, and she's took wi' the creepings at every stir in the hall. The doctor's wi' her noo. She was bad settin' out, and she's ligin' in her bed now. I thought she was a bit strackle-brained, I did truly, when I saw her first. I couldn't tell what she was drivin' at; but she knew well enough herself. She was troubled in mind, and freated terrible about the babby, and that betwattled I 'most thought she was daft."

"But she's not mad?" asked the vicar.

"Na, na, not a bit; only put about, and scared like."

"Where does she come from?"

"South — Lonnon, I take it — a long way. She looks like death 'most."

"Did she mention her name?" asked the vicar.

"Ay, sir, I wrote it down here."

And he plucked a scrap of paper from his waistcoat and read, Hileria Pullen."

"Hileria Pullen! Dear me!" said the vicar, with the scrap of paper in his fingers, and turning to his wife, who, with Kitty Bell, was busy over the child. "Why, here's that woman, Hileria Pullen, actually arrived at the George, and that's the child, and the woman's very ill. You saw her, didn't you? What kind of person does she seem to you to be? respectable?" asked the vicar.

"That she does, sir; yes, a decent, farrantly woman, none o' your fussocks, you know. A thin atomy of a woman, but well dressed. Not young, nor good-lookin'."

"All the better, perhaps," said the vicar.

"Thin and white-faced; fluke-mouthed, you'd say, sir."

"No, Tom, not that phrase," said the vicar.

"And hollow in the cheeks — dish-faced, you know. But I couldn't see very well, for the candle was little better than a pigtail-and they's dark enough-except just where a twine of the candlelight fell."

"And she wants to see me?" said the vicar, lighting a bedroom candle.

"Just so, your reverence."

"And the sacrament, you're sure?"

"Certain, sir."

Come in here, Tom. There is some of the port open from last Sunday. You will carry it down; the rest we shall find there."

And into the vicar's study they stepped.

There, in a corner under the secretary, the bottle stood, also the simple silver cup and the patten. These the clerk put up, while the vicar took his hat, and coat, and thick woollen gloves, and his stick.

"I'm going, my love, to see the poor woman; down to the George; only a step," said Doctor Jenner, with his mufflers on and his hat in his hand, extinguishing the candle he had just set down.

"And what is to be done with this poor little thing, Hugh?"

I wish so much it might remain.”

“Certainly, darling, whatever you like best—exactly what you think best; and I shan’t be very long away, and you shall hear all when I come back. And hadn’t I better send Mrs. Joliffe up here? she knows everything that ought to be done, and we pass her door on the way to the George.”

“Oh, thank you, Hugh, darling—the very thing. It is so thoughtful of you. You do always think of everything.”

And running up close to him for her farewell, she kissed him with her arms about him, on the lobby, she added, in a hurried whisper —

“You darling, I am so delighted!”

Smiling, the vicar ran down, and, opening the hall-door, the beautiful moonlight scene was before him. The solitary old trees in the foreground, the lake with its dark expanse and glimmering lights, and the mountains rising round like mighty shadows.

“A beautiful night, Tom,” said the vicar, as they stood for a moment on the hard, dry ground before his door.

“A black frost belike, sir,” answered Tom.

“The countless watch-fires of an unseen host, Tom,” said the vicar, looking up at the glorious field of stars above him, and then down again on the beautiful lake, and across it to the huge, phantom-like mountains; and then, a little to the left, the antique George Inn close by met his view and recalled him. So with a sigh he said—

“Let us get on, Tom; we have a serious duty before us. Poor woman! I trust we may find her better.”

And walking on the short green grass, beneath which the frozen earth echoed to their tread, he approached the one red light that glowed from its porch.

“Just tell Mrs. Joliffe, Tom, as we pass, that the mistress wants her at the house this moment.”

“May God send all for the best,” murmured the vicar as, alone, he raised his eyes to heaven. “But come whatsoever his wisdom may decree, the poor little thing is welcome to share with us.”

Hereupon he entered the door of the George, which was still open. He inquired for the sick woman.

The doctor was still with her, and was giving her hot negus. “A very good thing, and there can’t be any fever, then, I take it,” said the vicar, relieved.

“I’ll go upstairs, Tom, and see the doctor,” he said, addressing Shackles, who had joined him; “and I’ll take the bag in my hand,” he added, not caring that the silver vessels of the church should run a risk of accidental irreverence; “and I will call for you, Tom, as soon as you are required.”

Tom sat down at the bar for a chat with Mrs. Winder, and the vicar mounted the stairs with a gentle and measured step.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BABY'S FACE.

WHILE the vicar had been talking to Tom Shackles, his wife and Kitty Bell had been equally busy about the little creature whom the girl called the "barn."

The first thing that struck them was the fineness and even elegance of the interior wrappings in which it was enveloped.

"How nicely she keeps it! That must be a really conscientious woman, that Mrs. Pullen," said the good lady. "I hope, poor thing, she may recover."

Perhaps she was thinking of tempting Hileria Pullen to make Golden Friars her residence, and to live at the vicarage.

"How soundly it sleeps, poor little darling! I wonder, Kitty, whether it would matter if we unpinned the covering over its darling face? I do so long to look at it."

"Not it, ma'am. I would. I'd fain gie't a smoucher, the canny darlin'."

"But we mustn't kiss it yet, you know; not till it's awake; and now that I think, we ought not to lose a moment first in getting the nursery to rights. Mary will do that, and light a very good fire; and come back when you have told her. Is the little bed in the same place exactly?"

Ay, ma'am; it stoodens just where it did, in the nook by the fire."

"Yes, that's the best place. Run, Kitty, and see to that, and come back in a moment."

Away ran Kitty, and good Mrs. Jenner, in the delighted importance of her vicarious maternity, carried the little bale of flannels in her arms to the fireplace, where, very cautiously, she sat down, smiling, her head already full of the future, and the air glorious with cloudy castles and grand romances, of which the heroine lay so helpless and unconscious in her lap.

From the nursery, which good Mrs. Jenner for years had looked after, every now and then — lest, I suppose, a family should come upon them by surprise—Kitty Bell came quickly back again, with the same irrepressible grin upon her hale, honest face.

"Well, Kitty, a good fire in the nursery?"

"Hoot! ma'am, a grand fire, like a Kersmas stock a'most; the room's all alight wi't. The folk'll see it a gliskin' i' the lake, across from the fells, it gars a look so gladsome."

"We must not set the house on fire, though," said her mistress, in high glee.

"Na, na, that won't be, ma'am. Dick Carpenter says ye couldna burn the vicarage, 'tis so well biggit, all stone and hard oak; and dear me! baint it tired, poor, weeny, winsome thing; winking still, it be, God bless it."

"Yes, fast asleep; but I think we might peep now, Kitty, what do you say?"

"Surely, ma'am. Do let us, just a glent; 'twill do us good to see the weeny face o't."

And so, in eager whispers, speaking under their breath, they exchanged suggestions and cautions as they withdrew pin after pin; and at length the slumbering baby's face was disclosed to their longing eyes.

To say they were disappointed would be nothing—they were shocked. It was the ugliest baby they had ever seen, and looked, moreover, as if it were dying.

"Adzooks!" gasped Kitty, after a silence of some seconds. "Dear me! Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Jenner, in a whisper of amazement. "It certainly is very plain."

"Did I ever see such a windered babby as that!" exclaimed Kitty.

"It certainly is very thin," observed the vicar's wife to herself.

"It looks as if 'twas just un-gone," exclaimed Kitty.

"All but dead indeed, poor little thing!" said the mistress, echoing Kitty's criticism; "and I think that cheek is swollen. Oh, dear! it is such a pity."

"Did ye ever see sic a poor blea' little face?" continued Kitty, employing the epithet which in that country expresses pale and livid. "Happen as ca'ad it be?"

"No, it ain't cold — quite warm," said the crestfallen lady, very gently touching its cheek with her fingertips.

"I hope it mayn't prove a nafflin," added Kitty.

"No, no, no, Kitty; it's a plain child, but I see no sign of its being foolish or weak. Heaven forbid!" said Mrs. Jenner, alarmed.

"Whoever sid sic a barn?" repeated Kitty, that Job's comforter, deliberately, "now that the can'le shines right down on't. By t' mess! What'll the maister say when he comes back. 'Twill be a rue-bargain wi' him, I'm thinkin'."

"No, he'll not regret it— 'twasn't for its looks he took it. He thought it right; and he always does what he thinks right; but he will be disappointed — that can't be helped."

"We may come to like it yet, ma'am," said Kitty, to whose woman's heart something in that helpless, ugly little face appealed.

"I was just thinking so — I was," said the lady. "We may love it even more if it is sickly, poor little thing; and the less beauty it has, and the more suffering, the higher right has God given it to our compassion, help, and love."

Her eyes filled up with gentle tears as she spoke, and she stooped down and kissed the little baby; drawing it fondly to her lips, and again and again making amends, as it were, for the cold hospitality of its reception.

"'Twill— 'twill indeed— 'twill be welcome," said Kitty relenting also.

And in the midst of these caresses and welcomings, the child, I suppose under the endearments of good Mrs. Jenner, awoke and began to cry.

Its crying was not of the angry and shrilly sort. It was a low, gentle wail and sobbing, and much more moving than that higher-pitched and more energetic lamentation to which we are accustomed.

"There, there, there," said the women, and all kinds of hushing and soothing accompanied its sorrowing.

"Has Mrs. Jolliffe come, I wonder?"

Yes, she had arrived, and was in the nursery when Kitty Bell had left it.

"Come up to the nursery, Kitty. Take the candle, and I'll carry the child. I like carrying it, poor little thing. I feel I have been so unkind to it. I wish it could understand me, that I might beg its pardon."

So they trooped up to the nursery, where good Mrs. Jolliffe, tall, with a grave and kindly face, made her curtsy, and took the baby in her experienced arms; and with these movements, and sayings, and unintelligible words of power, intoned according to tradition, she tranquillised that troubled spirit in a way that Kitty, who was watching over one shoulder, admired and Mrs. Jenner, peering over the other, envied.

"How do she and the child so delightfully understand one another?" thought the vicar's wife. "How happy and how conceited Mrs. Jolliffe must be."

"By Jen!" exclaimed Kitty.

"You must not swear, Kitty," said the vicar's good wife.

"No, ma'am; but, lawk! don't ye see, ma'am? Look at its eyen! Hoot! sic a gloo it has."

"No, no, it does not squint," expostulated Mrs. Jenner in a new distress. "Surely it doesn't squint, Mrs. Jolliffe?"

"That little gloo is only the teething, ma'am; it won't signify."

"Thank Heaven," said poor Mrs. Jenner.

"Amen," responded Kitty. "And, oh, ma'am, doant the nursery look gladsome! Look around, ma'am, do, wi' the fire and the candle, and the poor weeny thing in the flannels, and Mrs. Jolliffe a singin' to it. For a nursery without a baby, it does look dowley, ma'am."

"So it does, indeed," said the vicar's wife, with a kind look at the girl, that was almost as good as a kiss.

"And when Mrs. Jolliffe ain't here, I'm to take care o' the child, and I'll talk and sing to it so canty all day; ain't I, ma'am?"

"Very likely, Kitty."

"Ha, ha!" said Kitty, with a broad grin.

## CHAPTER VI.

### HILERIA PULLEN.

WHILE all this and a great deal more was going on in the nursery, in the George Inn, whose porch and sign you could see from the window in the moonlight, the vicar had walked upstairs and tapped at the door to which the chambermaid had conducted him. The doctor told him to come in.

There was now quite a little levee in the stranger's room. Hileria Pullen was in bed. She was, in truth, neither young nor pretty, being somewhat yellow, and very sharp of feature. She looked woefully exhausted, and thought that she was dying. She lay making a straight, narrow ridge down the centre of a rather large four-poster. At the foot stood Mr. Turnbull, of the George, grave, bald, and florid, in a vast white waistcoat, a brass-buttoned blue coat, and a big bunch of watch-seals dangling on the paunch of his drab trousers. At the end of the bolster stood short, energetic Doctor Lincote, with his fingers on Hileria's pulse, and his watch in the palm of his other hand. The vicar glided silently to the side of the pillow opposite the doctor, who, stuffing his watch into his fob, said with decision —

"Don't mind your sensations, ma'am, you're better. Glad to see you, Mr. Jenner. This is the vicar, ma'am. I hope we'll disappoint him, ma'am. We'll hardly ask for our viaticum yet, Mr. Vicar, ha, hey?"

"Glad to hear you say so, doctor. You're in very safe hands, Mrs. Pullen. How do you feel, pray?"

"Jest gone, sir, please," answered the patient querulously. The doctor winked across the bed to the vicar, to intimate that he was to take that announcement with a grain of allowance.

"And you remember you told Mr. Turnbull to let nobody into his inn; but that couldn't be, you know; so you must be more precise, and say who you mean, do you see? and if you want to talk to him, you must take a glass of sherry first for I need not tell you, you are very much exhausted. I see she *does* wish to speak to you, Turnbull. Hand her a glass of sherry — hold it yourself to her lips, you'd better."

And while the host was doing that congenial office, the doctor came round the bed and signed to the vicar, who followed him to the corner of the room next the window, and there in a whisper he said —

"A very hysterical subject, she is; in a high state of excitement, and utterly over-fatigued and exhausted. You may guess what that is; but there's nothing at present to alarm."

"You have been giving her ether," said the vicar; "I smell it."

"Very sharp — very sharp, Mr. Vicar; you know the leading medicines, and the leading cases. You have a very pretty notion of medicine; I often told you. She's half mad with fright about some captain she says is pursuing her. By Jove! he must be a very hot-blooded fellow — eh?"

"I'm only a poor woman," said the female voice in a quaver from the bed; "but you are gentlemen, and you'll consider me all the same; and Captain Torquil is coming after me on account of that child — and he's a dangerous man." Here the doctor winked again at the vicar. "And my life would not be safe if his anger got the better of him; and you must not let him know or guess I'm here. If you do, you'll have all to answer for."

"No, my good woman, you may rely upon it. Of course, Turnbull, she may depend upon you. Make your mind quite easy, upon my honour you may," said the doctor. And aside to the vicar he whispered —

"Did you ever, in all your days, see a poor creature in such a terror? I really believe, if he got into the room, 'twould either kill her outright, or put her out of her reason."

"Poor thing! it is most pitiable," said the vicar.

"And oh, sir, is the child safe?"

"Quite, my good woman," answered the vicar, drawing near.

"And in your house, sir?"

"In my house," answered he.

"And if you give it up, may you be judged."

"Now, my good woman, you must not be trying to sit up; don't you see you're not equal to it?" said the doctor. "Compose yourself for tonight, and in the morning you may talk as long as you like."

"I shan't live to see the morning, sir. May the Lord have mercy, and forgive my sins," she answered in an agony. "And now, sir, parson Jenner, give me the holy sacrament to my comfort, and pray for me, as you hope for mercy yourself, when you come to this dreadful hour."

## CHAPTER VII.

### NEXT MORNING

FERVENTLY, with upturned eyes, with hands joined together, with the dew of agony on her face, and a trembling voice, did Hileria Pullen do her part in the great rite of the Church.

And when it was over, she did seem comforted, and after a while, composed; and at last, worn out with fatigue, and aided by Doctor Lincote's draught, she fell asleep, and slept deep and serenely till nearly ten o'clock next morning.

The little child slept also a great deal, but not so easily. Mrs. Jolliffe, who had remained in charge of it, was of opinion that there was some sickness hanging over it.

All through the night it was starting, as if in sudden pain, and "blarin' ye could hear it across the green a'most; and there's arrals come out all over its skin; and its poor, tiny-winey joints is creaked wi' fits like, and 'twas always workin' aswint in the bed; and it looks so pined," said Mrs. Jolliffe, making her report; "and the babby's very bad-there's nout else to be said; and what its sickness may be, there's none can tell; 'taint like none that's go in', unless happen the doctor might guess."

In the midst of this consternation the doctor, who had been sent for, arrived.

Mrs. Jenner, Mrs. Jolliffe, Kitty, and even Mall, the cook, were assembled there, hanging upon the words, and even the looks of the sage.

The doctor examined the child curiously, like a work of art. Then he stood up and looked at it with a frown, and asked some questions of Mrs. Jolliffe; and then he peered at it again, and felt its skin, and its pulse, and looked keenly into its eyes, and at last he remarked —

"It's a very odd case indeed. Did you ever see a case like that, quite, Mrs. Jolliffe? No, I rather think not. It's as odd a case as ever I saw. That child's diet must have been played with. I'd say-only I know it has been in honest hands-the child was poisoned. Not enough, I hope, to kill it, whatever's wrong. But it has had a squeak for it. Warm bathing; just a very little medicine I'll send; as much whey and goat's milk as it will drink, and the room kept warm but airy; and trust the rest to young blood, and the energy of new life. Disease, Mrs. Jenner, ma'am, quails before children."

"You observe its eyes, Mr. Lincote. Do you think there is a -a squint, doctor?"

"I don't think so, ma'am," he answered. "It is a more dangerous thing — a symptom of pressure on the brain. Only slight, but it shows how general the derangement is."

"I knew 'twas bad," said Kitty, "for it only healed when I sang til't, and jinked t'keys before its een."

"If the light hurts its eyes, put a screen before it; and give it nothing solid to eat; and we'll see how it gets on towards evening again."

So the doctor took his leave.

Saint George and the Dragon, in spite of the sanguinary character of the situation, looked quite pleasant in the sharp, frosty sun this morning.

Familiar as this piece of blazonry was to the vicar's eyes, hanging over the edge of the road, exactly opposite the porch of the George Inn, the good clergyman thought that the valiant knight's casque and mail, and the dragon's scales, splendid in Dutch gold, and the gorgeous crimson throat of the monster, down which the saint of the azure cloak and red cross had insinuated his gilded lance, never looked more; becomingly. The animated spires of the reptile's burnished tail, and the goodhumoured grace with which the saint tickled rather than pierced its vermilion interior, gave an air of amicable frolic to the encounter, which quite took away any unpleasantness in the affair.

"Brilliant day, Mr. Turnbull," said the vicar, with brilliant Saint George and the Dragon still in his eye; "and how is the poor woman to-day?"

"She freats a deal after the bam, sir," said the innkeeper; "but the doctor says she's better this morning, and she's wearying to see you."

"She shan't weary long then," said the vicar cheerily.

And in a few minutes more he stood in the sick woman's room.

"How does Mrs. Pullen to-day?" he asked. "I'm glad to hear the doctor says you are better."

"I wish I could see it, sir; I thank you all the same," whimpered Hileria, who liked the sympathy due to sickness. "I'm very weak, sir. I hope I may leave this bed alive, sir."

"Would you rather that I looked in another time, Mrs. Pullen? I live close by."

"Please, sir, how is the poor darling baby?" she inquired. "They are taking every care of it; and the doctor shall look after it until it is quite well again, which I trust may be very soon."

"Thank God, sir. It's a sweet little thing, sir. May heaven bless and keep it. My heart's a-breakin'-I miss it so."

And Hileria, not finding her pockethandkerchief at the moment, hastily applied the hem of the sheet to her eyes.

"You will be sufficiently recovered, I trust, very soon, Mrs. Pullen, to come and see the child; and if not, the child will very soon be well enough to come and see you."

"I'm thinking, sir, that can hardly be. I'm afraid, sir-I'm afraid of my life-of that man. I'm well off, sir: I'm well to do — thanks to the poor mistress. She left me by her will five hundred pounds, and I have my savings beside; and I'll be easy for the rest of my days, I hope; and I'll keep out of sight, sir, please, till this thing's blowed over; for he's a bad man, I'm afraid, sir; and he's driven nigh desperate by losses and crosses lately, they say; and I should not wonder at anything he may do — he's that savage; and t'would be a mercy almost he drew his razor across his throat, and made away with himself."

"You speak of-of whom?" said the vicar.



“Captain Torquil, sir. He has not been here yet, but he will, I’m sure o’ that; and Mr. Turnbull has promised he won’t let him suppose I’m here. And you, sir, won’t neither; for he’s in a mad state, he is, and till I’m away, and out of his reach, I don’t count my life safe.”

“I’m shocked to hear you so speak of Captain Torquil. Not that I’m acquainted with him, or know anything particularly about him; but, everything considered, it is very shocking to think there should have been anything to give a colour in your mind to such language.”

“I’ll tell you, sir — I’ll tell you all,” said Hileria. “That is one reason has brought me here. If you can spare time now, ‘twill be best you should hear it at once. And I’d like to have it off my mind, sir; for I sometimes think ‘twill set me mad, striving to keep it to myself.

“You need not hurry yourself, I can afford you plenty of time,” said the vicar. “Shall I take a chair?”

“Please, sir; and I’ll tell you the best I can. I’m very weak, sir, as you see, but I’ll try and tell it as short as I can, sir.”

Hileria Pullen, with a lean, bilious face and very black eyes, was sitting up in the bed, with a wrapper on and a shawl drawn round her angular figure; a nightcap, with a broad, faded silk ribbon pinned tightly about it, round her head; and some black hair, streaked with white, peeping from under this pale ligature of lilac and faint green.

“Thank you, sir,” said she, and she hemmed to clear her voice, as the vicar took his seat near the foot of the bed, crossing his gaitered leg, and holding his hat and stick on his knee as he inclined an attentive ear towards the sick woman who had a story to tell.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HILERIA PULLEN'S ACCOUNT OF CAPTAIN AND MRS. TORQUIL.

"YOU don't know that family, sir, Captain and Mrs. Torquil?" she began.

"No, I've never seen them," said he.

"After the poor mistress died, sir, the captain came down hot foot to Snedley with his lawyer — his lady, Mrs. Torquil, being named in the will for something-and he took a deal on him, and directed all things; and, not having no copy of the will at the time, which I have one now, I could not gainsay nothing. And he ordered me and the child away to Mrs. Torquil at Guildford."

"And weren't you comfortable there?" asked the vicar.

"Yes, sir, well enough in a way, but theie was things against it; comfortable in a manner, but not a house such as quiet folk would like to live in. Captain Torquil was a very nice-spoken gentleman at first, but no one likes him long; and he's scarce ever at Guildford, always in London. So much the better for them as lives in t'other place. A very violent-tempered, dangerous gentleman."

"But Mrs. Torquil, you found *her* kind, I dare say?" said the vicar.

"Mrs. Torquil, sir, is nothing in her own house," said she.

"Oh! controlled by her husband, I suppose?" he suggested.

"Well, sir, I may mention to you, she's scarce ever out of her bedroom. The fact is, sir — what I wouldn't on no account tell to another — the poor lady has her failin', and it's come to that she's scarce ever out of her bed."

"She's too fond of drinkin', sir, and has ruined her 'ealth, which she cannot last very long, sir; and 'twill not fret them much, I'm afraid, that should fret most. 'Tis a bad world, sir, and a sorrowful; and I'm told, poor lady, if she had bin happier mated she'd a bin very different in many ways."

"Dear me! poor thing! that's very sad," said the clergyman, with something of wonder as well as of pain. "That such things are, who could believe if one didn't see them? Ah, Mrs. Pullen, in the midst of li fe we are in death — that spiritual death, which is so unspeakably more terrible for us than its awful physical image. It is very sad indeed, Mrs. Pullen, what you tell me."

"So it is, sir, and he leading such a life they do say — gambling, and every other wickedness-and no servants stops there any length of time; and often not the price of a loaf in that house for days together, and credit hard to get for that house, I can tell you, sir."

"But how did Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen's Snedley, come to admit him at her house?"

"Law love you, sir, she knew nothing. If she had a knewn what sort he was, or she, poor lady, she'd a' never left them nothing in hei will, nor suffered him nigh the house. But he had a way with him, and flattered her, poor good lady; she was too simple for such like. It wasn't till I came to Guildford that I got a copy of the will from Mr. Tute, the lawyer. I have it here, sii, in this bag, by my bed; and I'd be glad, sir, if you'd read it, or get a copy took, since the poor darling child is under your care, which, as you will hear, is the saving of its life, no less, the blessed baby."

"Pray explain — do, my good friend, explain what you mean."

"What I mean, sir, please, is just this. The poor mistress has left all she can, except about fifty pounds a year, to her cousin, Mrs. Torquil, which she would as soon have burnt her hand in the fire as have done it, if she had a knewn that the poor lady was always more or less in liquor, and seldom out of her bedroom, or fit to speak to no one, I'm sorry to say, sir."

The vicar raised his hands and eyes, and shook his head slowly. "She had in her power to leave about a thousand a year, which she has left to the darling child, Miss Laura; and if the dear baby should die unmarried, it is all to go, you will see, sir, when you come to read the will, to her afflicted cousin-little she thought what was afflicting of her — Mrs. Torquil."

"Is Captain Torquil appointed guardian to the child?"

"Not he, sir."

"Then he has no more right to the custody of that child than he has to the custody of you or me!" said the vicar. "He has no more right than Mr. Turnbull, the innkeeper here — less in fact; because if anything happened to the child he would have a great accession of fortune. He is, for that reason, the very last person who should have charge of the child; no selection could possibly be more improper."

"Well, sir, I'll tell you just what happened; but please, sir, you'll promise not to get me into no trouble for speaking so plain; for, indeed, sir, except to show you how the matter really is, and what a sin it would be in the sight of God to give the child back to that bad man, I would not open my lips to no one on the matter."

"I see what you mean — that is, I can understand why Captain Torquil, as I have said, should, on consideration, most gladly rid himself of all responsibility about the child."

"Ah! sir, that ain't what the captain wants. But I don't like it no ways, and I could not stay no longer at Guildford, at no price. I could not allow him to take to doctoring the baby, sir." And she looked darkly at the vicar, and nodded.

"Eh? I don't quite understand," hesitated the good man.

"This was it, you must know, sir. He didn't trouble us out at Guildford much with his company, no more than his money, and he never paid a shilling nowhere without disputing and fighting over it like a dog and cat; but that's neither here nor there. He did come out to Guildford about ten days after we got there, and he spoke me fair, and made me a present, and for all that there was something about him I did not like, and I could not know myself what it was, only there *was*. What I then saw first against him was the way he used to walk into poor Mrs. Torquil's room; just shove open the door and walk in, as if 'twas a stable, and look at her as if he'd like to strangle her; and never a good morning, nor how do you do; and she all of a tremble while he was there, and no word, I am sorry to say, sir, too bad to call her. And whatever she may be, poor lady, it isn't for him to call her them dreadful names — before servants more especially, when 'twas his own bad treatment that brought her to it; and she there

with never a word, nothing but just crying and sobbing, poor thing, as if her heart would break; and whatever money there was, everyone knew 'twas with her it came. Well, he never stayed long, I must say, in her room, only to rummage about for her letters, and reading every scrap ôf paper he could find.

"Well, sir, the first time Captain Torquil came out I did not know him so well, and he walked upstairs right to the nursery — a queer place for a gentleman to be poking into-and he was very nice-spoken and smiling, and he asked how I was, and hoped I was comfortable, and told me to ask for whatever I wanted. And he said he heard the child had a cold. And I said it had, but was getting better; and he said smiling, 'You know, nurse, I'm a great doctor,' which I told him I did not know it before.

"Yes," said he. "Would you mind putting it to bed, and I'll have it quite well by tomorrow. It is feverish, and till that is right it can't get better."

"Well, sir, it was only wrapped round with its flannels and my quilted shawl, and the little cot all ready, so I did as he bid me; and said he, 'The thing it wants is James's powder, and you know how to manage it.'

"And then he went downstairs, and came back, and divided the powder he brought, with him in two; and he said he'd come back and see how it did. And I gave it that powder-he standing by — and it never was the same since."

"H'm!" said the vicar, with his eyes fixed on a knot in the floor.

And a little silence followed.

"Well, sir, you see, he was angry when I refused to give the child the t'other half of the powder; and when he frowns, and laughs, and turns white, as he does when he's vexed, he looks very bad, and I could not get his face out of my head, although he did not stay long, nor make much of the matter. But lately he's bin coming up again to the nursery, and he says the child isn't thriving with me, which I know well what it was as disagreed with the darling infant, and he wanted me to give it a bottle he had made up in his coat pocket, and I said I'd rayther not, and he pulled off the wrapper and showed me the label with 'Daffy's Elixir' on it, and the name of the apothecary; and he said, 'You *must* give it the medicine, the child will die else;' and I said, 'I won't give it no physic, except what the doctor over the way orders and makes up;' and with that he laughed and called me a fool, and slapt his hand down on the table, and told me to be ready to quit the house and give up the child to a new nurse the next morning; and he gave me a look that frightened me, and I heard him laughing very angry as he ran down the stairs.

"Now, if that stuff in the bottle was really 'Daffy's Elixir' and nothing mixed in it, why mightn't he a' left it where he had put it, on the table, instead of taking it away again in his pocket? Mind ye, sir, I don't say nothing, but I know what I thought. I was as cold as lead, and trembling all over, and I think I'd a took a fit, only I looked at the poor darling little baby, and I burst out a-cryin,' and that I think saved me."

Here Hileria Pullen paused, and the vicar said what is told in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HILERIA PULLEN'S ADVENTURES.

"YOU are right, Mrs. Pullen, to be very cautious in what you say, because there is no proof, nothing but suspicion. You may depend upon me. You were right to be frank, and you have acted perfectly right. How soon after that did you leave?"

"I'll tell you all, sir, please. I never was so frightened in all my days. It was easy enough for me to take care of myself. It was just the thing he'd a liked best, for me to take myself off, and leave him to say what he liked of me, and have his will of the darling babby. I knowed well enough what I was afraid of, and who to hinder him? La, sir, you would not think the taking I was in."

"I can well understand it, Mrs. Pullen, *well*; go on, pray, I'm all attention," said the vicar.

"I was ill, sir, and that made matters worse," said Mrs. Pullen, "*much* worse. I wasn't good for nothing; there wasn't 'amost no life in me. I thought of this thing and that, as well as I could, with my poor head; and I'd a blessed God, if an angel had come into the room, and told me that me and the baby was to die that night. But God knows best what's fit for us all."

"Very true, Mrs. Pullen; that is our best consolation, come what may. If we could only believe that 'God is Love,' we should bear the afflictions of this life with serener hearts," interposed the good vicar.

"I soon made up my mind," continued Hileria Pullen, "that, come what would, the baby I would not leave. But then, where was the good of my staying there till the captain came back, with his screeching curses, and his bottles, and powders, and a new nurse — nurse, indeed! Hileria Pullen would not have been long for that nursery! And the darling babby would have been in strange arms, and a bad business at the 'old Hall' before a week, and, most like, no talk about it; or, if there was, some awful story trumped up to fix the blame on me. May the Lord deliver us from all evil!"

"It is a world of sorrow, Mrs. Pullen," observed the vicar. "It is a world of wickedness, sir," said Hileria.

"That it is, also," allowed Dr. Jenner; "sin and sorrow, twin offspring of the Fall. Go on, pray."

"The thought came to me—I trust in the Lord it may have been from Him—that as *there* I could not stay, and, moreover, as leave the babby I loved, better, I may say, than myself, in that place, to them that was going to take it in hand, I could not; which it would have been nothing less but to lend a hand in what was intended to be done, which God forbid."

"Amen, *amen*," murmured the clergyman.

"So there was nothing left me, but one chance for it. I made up my mind I'd take the child with me, or lose my life," said Hileria Pullen. "Being as you are, you can't understand, sir, how I felt. If you was me, in that dismal place, undertaking that great risk, with the chance of meeting Captain Torquil, who was drove desperate almost by his crosses and losses, being one of them wicked men that would not stop at nothing, you would know what it was to fear for your life like I did. As he now is, I really think he would do or say anything almost."

"I hope not; I trust not. Still it was, you know, a great venture, under any circumstances; it was, you know, irregular, and appearances might be held to be against you; but undoubtedly you did right, and I think you a heroine, Mrs. Pullen," said the clergyman.

"So I am, sir, I hope, and all my papers and discharges correct. A good nurse I have bin to the poor babby, according to my opportunities. Well, sir, the end of it was, having made my mind up, sir, to try it, and having, by the mercy of heaven, some money in my box; that night, I said nothing to any one living, and I took the child, poor little thing, and I dressed it, as you see. And, ill though I was, I stole away with the baby, and no one missed me till next morning, I take it — for that was a house where most people did as they liked, except when the master was there — and none cared about their own business — much less other people's."

"But you said Captain Torquil followed you. How was that?"

"We were two hours late the second day, at a small town called Twinton, when I got out with the baby, meaning to cross to this."

"Two hours late, were you? How was that?" asked the vicar.

"We had thirty mile of snow on the way, sir," said Hileria, looking as miserable as she could, "and north of that, some of the road all one sheet of ice."

"Yes, to be sure; so I heard; there was a fall of snow between Scardon and Derby. We shall have it here soon, I dare say," observed Mr. Jenner, looking toward the windows.

"You'll mind the inn at Twinton, sir?" said she.

"To be sure, 'The Guy of Warwick.' You found it a comfortable place, I'm sure. It is a kinsman of Mr. Turnbull, our host here, who keeps it," said Mr. Jenner.

"Yes; good fires they had, sir. It was there we stopped. I was afraid to stay downstairs in the public room, and I kept the child under my cloak, so that the people downstairs could not see it; for I could not tell who might be asking them questions by-and-by. So up the stairs I went, and the chambermaid put me into a big room over the door, and there was a fire at the far end; but I could not keep away from the big bow window looking along the white frosty road, towards London. La! sir, everything that came up that way, how my heart went thump and flutter, flutter and thump!"

"Why did you stay so long on such dangerous ground?" inquired the vicar.

"There was a coach expected every minute that would bring me more than half way to Golden Friars, and I could get out at a place called Scardon Hall, where there was horses."

I thought if the captain came up, what should I do, me and the child, if he should hear at Twinton there was any one had ordered a shay for Golden Friars. He'd have questioned them all, through and through, right and left, up and down, he'd 'a bin out in the stable, and up in the garrets, and if I was hid in the cock-loft, he'd have ferreted me out, and heaven 'ave mercy on me

then! So I thought, as there might be a delay, 'twould be wiser to say little, and keep out of observation, and just take the coach, when it came up, as far as Scardon Hall. The coach was a bit late, and every minute seemed as long as an hour to me, thinking I never could be out of the highway soon enough.

"The baby was asleep, poor little thing. I laid it on the bed, not far from the fire. I could not eat a mouthful, I was too much afraid for that; I could not stay near the fire, cold as I was; I could do but one thing, and that was, to stand in the window, and watch the road, holding my breath, and counting the minutes by my watch.

"I was there more than an hour I should think, and it was moonlight still, and I saw a chaise and four pull up at the door, and Captain Torquil put his head out of the window, and he asked how long it was since the mail-coach passed, and they told him. They were wetting the horses' mouths, and though it was a frosty night, they were steaming up in a cloud with heat; and he asked how far on was the place where they changed horses, and they told him five miles only; and he said, 'They have left that, I suppose, half an hour ago,' and they said, 'That at least;' and he said, 'They were behind time here;' and they said they lost time by the ice on the road, where the floods were — which was true — and they were bringing it up now. Then he asked them how long the next stage was, and they told him thirteen miles; and he said, 'We shan't overtake them next stage, then;' and they said, hardly."

"You remember all this very distinctly," said the vicar.

"Every word of it went into my ear like a penknife, I'll never forget word or look, or turn or sight of the four minutes that passed then. I was standing with the baby in the big window over the door, and in the broad moonlight, and I could no more move from where I stood than the post outside with the painted sign swinging to it.

"I did not feel myself nor the child for the time, nor as if I had a body at all, but only just eye and ear, and like to fall down dead with fear of him, for you don't know all I've heard of that man. Well, sir, you may guess how I felt when he raised his eyes to the very window where me with the baby in my arms was standing.

"I felt my eyes growing as big as saucers in my head, staring at him; and the captain leaned out, and made as if he was going to open the door. But, heaven be thanked, he did not see me. I think 'twas the shine of the moonlight back again from the panes of glass that hid me. He held his watch in the light of the moon, leaning out, and he called to the postboys to be off; and, I thank God, I saw them drive on at a great pace the next minute. I had been trembling the whole journey, in fear of him overtaking me, for I knew that he would think I had taken the northern coach, having a sister married in Edinburgh, and he knew she wanted me to go to live with her; and I do suppose he went right to the coach office when he heard I was gone, and found out what passengers went, and then he followed. I mentioned you to him, also, once, sir, as one that should be consulted; and when he finds I haven't gone on by the coach, I know he'll make straight for this."

"Not unlikely. Give me the copy of the will, and I will have our lawyer's opinion as to its effect; and — there is Mr. Turnbull. I hear him in the lobby."

And he called in the innkeeper, and gave him a solemn charge, in case of inquiries after Mrs. Pullen, to withhold all information, which that grave person undertook to do.

"My people doesn't know her name, and I'll give them directions to say nothing."

"And should Captain Torquil, or any one on his behalf, make inquiry about the child, please say that I have taken that matter in hand, and refer him to my attorney, Mr. Tarlcot. And now I'll take the copy of the will, ma'am-thanks; and I'll bring it back to you when he has made a note of it."

So he bid her goodbye, and was approaching the door, when suddenly she screamed, starting upright in the bed, "Oh law, sir, he's come!"

"Hush! Captain Torquil do you mean?"

"Oh! yes, sir. I hear his voice."

## CHAPTER X.

### CAPTAIN TORQUIL.

THE vicar leaned over the banisters, and heard a clear and somewhat sharp voice talking in the hall with Mr. Turnbull, and his own name mentioned.

At this time of year few strangers passed through Golden Friars, and having never before heard those clear resolute tones in which he was named, he concluded that the visitor could be no other than Captain Torquil.

So that worthy divine put his hat on his head, and with a dignified air went down the back stair, and through the inn yard, with swift paces to the attorney's house.

Brevity was urgent, for although there was nothing excited in the gentlemanlike accents which he had overheard, Mr. Turnbull, of the George, would at once, as agreed, send Captain Torquil on to the attorney. It would be awkward to be surprised there, and the clerical costume, the good vicar pointedly observed, would make identification inevitable.

Mr. Luke Tarlcot, the attorney, was a goodnatured fellow enough — a man of sixty years and upwards, a serious man, a fat man, cautious and taciturn, and diplomatic on occasion.

Holding this gentleman by the corner of his coat collar, he poured, as briefly as he could, into his ear the strange story of Hileria Pullen and Captain Torquil, and produced the late Mrs. Mildmay's will, which, happily, was very short.

"I'll get away, I won't meet him; he'll be here in no time. Let me out through your garden; come-come-quickly." And out the back way, through Mr. Tarlcot's leafless plum-trees and winter cabbages, and under the thick ivied arch into the lane, the clergyman marched quickly, and so away by the hard pathway, with his back to the lake and the town, towards the solemn mountains, at whose foot lay the farmstead of his sick parishioner, Farmer Bligh, trusting that by the time of his return at sunset, Captain Torquil would be many miles beyond the outlines of the purple mountains that surround Golden Friars.

Mr. Tarlcot returned thoughtfully to his room, which was somewhat darksome, and had an oldfashioned and grimy air, and sat himself down in his office chair, and slipped the copy of the will into the drawer before him. And almost at the same moment he heard a gentlemanlike voice say, "This way?" And before the maid could announce him, a handsome man, with an air of fashion, very black hair, very delicately-chiselled features, which had something the effect of a carving in ivory, a little yellowed by time, entered the room.

This gentleman had his hat in his hand, and an exquisite little walking-stick, and he carried a sort of light drap wrapper across his arm. The attorney observed this gentleman's French boots and French gloves, and also that he appeared quite unconscious how much finer he was than the figures that usually walked about the purlieus of the George in Golden Friars.

He made a slight bow, and walked towards the table, at which the attorney had risen to receive him.

"I've looked in about a very odd affair, Mr. Tarlcot. My name is Torquil. Your clergyman here, Mr. Jenner, has probably mentioned Captain Torquil. The most extraordinary piece of villainy has been practised upon me and my wife, Mrs. Torquil, by a servant who has kidnapped — may I sit down?" said the captain, not waiting, however, for leave — "kidnapped I may say our child — a young child consigned to our care by the will of its mother, a widow, a very near relation of my wife's.

I have had an infinity of trouble. I've followed all the way from London forty miles north of this place, and found on overtaking the coach that she had got out, and come across, as I rightly conjectured, here. At your hotel, round the corner, they tell me that she did so, and brought the infant with her. They say they don't know what's become of her, but that your — yourthe Reverend Mr. Jenner makes himself responsible for the child."

Here was a little silence. The attorney did not break it. He looked down industriously on his desk, and leaned a little forward.

"Am I rightly informed?" asked Captain Torquil.

"If you will permit me, when you have quite done, I shall then state all I am at liberty to state on the subject."

"Oh! exactly; then I shan't say another word. The child has been stolen, and your client, the rector, or whatever he is, says I'm to look to him, and refers me to you, so here I am."

"Is there any particular question you wish to put to me?" asked Mr. Tarlcot.

"Certainly. Being the guardian of the child, I demand its restoration. Where shall I find it?"

"I can't tell you where the child is to be found, Captain Torquil. But the Reverend Mr. Jenner is differently advised as to your position in relation to that child; and his information is fortified by the copy of the will of the late Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen's Snedley, Mrs. Jenner's relative."

"Your copy can hardly be better than a-a-quiz, sir, if it omits that. But it is perfectly immaterial to me. I know my rights and powers, and once for all, and to save your client the ruinous consequences into which you are about to run him, I demand that the child be replaced in my hands."

"I have not got it, sir, and I may as well be quite explicit. If that child were in my custody I should not feel warranted in placing it in your hands; and I should decline to do so," said the old attorney firmly.

"Then you know where it is."

"I don't say that, sir."

"And you refuse to restore or to disclose it," continued the captain.

The attorney was silent.

"You refuse to give me any information?"

"I don't say that I have any to give, sir; but if I had I should refuse it," said Mr. Tarlcot.

The captain stared at him fixedly, with whitening face, and eyes that gleamed for a few moments.

"Very well, sir," said the captain, with a sudden effort. "Your client adopts the outrage of that servant, and receives and conceals my kidnapped ward. Very good, sir, I suppose you understand your own business. We'll try that. I'll open your eyes.

You shall hear from me, you may tell your parson.”

“You may possibly hear from us first, sir,” said Mr. Tarlcot, determined not to be bullied.

“What do you mean by that, sir?” asked the captain, in an icy tone, leaning the knuckles of both hands on the desk, and advancing his sharp and pallid features towards the attorney. “It seems to me, sir, that you would not object to my losing my temper and striking you. I’ll not make any such fool of myself. You shan’t get your hand into my pocket for damages. I’ll make short work with your clerical patron. I’ll drive off to that town — what’s its name? — nine miles away, and I’ll get the police here.”

The attorney bowed. He did not wish further to heat his enemy, who had arrived already at the candescent point.

Grasping his hat, stick, and wrapper, which he had laid down on the table, he flung from the room, laughing and grinding his teeth as he passed through the hall; and before the attorney who followed him to do the honours, could overtake him, he had clapped the door with a clang that made the whole house vibrate.

## CHAPTER XI.

### APPROACHING.

HIS chaise had followed him to the steps, and he sprang into it, shut the door himself, pulled up the window, and leaned back. He was not long in collecting his ideas, for the attorney, standing in the middle of his room, saw him let down the front window and call something to the driver, who forthwith got his horses into motion.

Mr. Tarlcot, watching the vehicle as it drove away, observed that it turned the corner, not in the direction of the town he had named, but of the George.

"Forgot something there," conjectured the lawyer. "Oh! hey? why he may be going on to the vicar's house, and upon my life there's no one there but a parcel of women to meet him.

In haste he put on his hat, and was out on the steps in a moment, and trotted down to the corner, with an anxious face.

There one commands a view across the front of the George inn, and of some houses beyond it, along the margin of the lake, to the vicar's house.

The elm trees and the two grey piers, capped with stone balls, stained and worn with the rains and suns of two centuries, stood hardly four hundred yards away.

It was with a very uncomfortable sensation that he saw the chaise draw up at the vicar's house, and Captain Torquil spring out and run up to the hall door.

Mr. Tarlcot was nothing short of very much frightened when he saw this. He was a serious man, and never swore—and the "bless my soul!" with which he witnessed the occurrence very inadequately expressed the intensity of his feeling. The attorney looked this way and that, in his perplexity; and he bethought him of Tom Shackles, whom he saw at that moment striding into the George. So he followed him in, and talked a little with him in the hall.

In the meantime, the vicar's house had received this sinister visitor.

When he knocked at the door, good Mrs. Jenner was in the scene of her new and delightful interest. The baby was in a sound sleep — Mrs. Jolliffe pronounced it very refreshing — and Mrs. Jenner and Kitty Bell, with their souls in their eyes, smiled down benedictions and thanksgivings in breathless silence upon the little slumberer. When the knock was heard at the hall-door, Mrs. Jenner, with a shudder, wondered how any one could be so brutal as to run such a risk as that of drumming a doubleknock just at the hour when it might be supposed the little darling was asleep.

She stole softly out on the lobby, and listened. She heard the stranger inquire for her, and Mall answer that she was at home. She then heard them both go up to the drawingroom and the visitor say "Captain Torquil."

A sudden faintness overcame Mrs. Jenner for a moment on hearing that dreaded name. But her very terror strung up her energies; and with a light step, and pale face, she entered the nursery, and said —

"Here's a man come about the baby. Lock the door on the inside, when I go, and keep my precious darling safe."

"Agoy!" exclaimed Kitty, popping her head out at the nursery door, with round eyes, and round mouth, and good honest round cheeks. "What shall we do wi' t' bab, ma'am? We can't get down wi't, 'twould begin bledderin', and he'd be sure to catch it. If I had but the sword that's in the master's study, ma'am."

"Be quiet, Kitty—don't talk like a mafflin'. Get into the room, and open to no one till I tell you."

And with these words, Mrs. Jenner assumed her stateliest air; and shaking out her brown silk dress a little, she went downstairs to the drawingroom with as dauntless a demeanour as she could command, and an awful tremor at her heart.

Mrs. Jenner was quite a lady, though something of that stiff school which has quite passed away.

With her a curtesy was no make-belief, but a dignified salutation, during which you might leisurely count four, or walk across the room. She saw a man lightly and elegantly made, and strikingly handsome, though not young.

He turned about from the window, where he stood as she entered, looking across the lake at the mountains that seemed so towering and so near, and made her a grand-seigneur bow, as ceremonious and more graceful than her own old English curtesy.

She was agreeably surprised! There was here something so deferential, so graceful, so engaging.

Captain Torquil introduced himself, and made many apologies for disturbing her. Ladies in the country, who were known to be really kind and charitable, he knew, had hardly ever an hour to themselves.

He was so glad, he said, that this little excursion to look after a foolish runaway servant should have led him back, though only for a moment, to Golden Friars. When he was a boy he had been here for three months, every year, for three years in succession; and had walked over those beautiful mountains again and again; and knew every rivulet and ravine, every curve and hollow, especially of that huge clump of mountains that overhung the lake. He remembered this house so well; that was long before her time. It was a Mr. Drayton, he thought, that had it then. A change very much for the better when Mr. Jenner came.

This he said pointedly.

And particularly he remembered Mrs. Drayton. She was not at all liked down here. Country people are very discriminating; they know a lady. It would be a great pleasure to his poor wife, who was a sad invalid, to hear how her cousin at Golden Friars was. What this delightful air and exquisite scenery can do for people! A paradise that communicates its own immortality. He wished so much he could get his poor wife into some such exquisite panorama, and vivifying atmosphere.

"She's not old. Still, I need not tell you, a young woman, poor Janet might be almost in her best looks at this moment; and if she had lived in a place like this, she would have been. You and she are contemporaries, I know."

Good Mrs. Jenner was six years her senior.

"And I find it certainly very hard to believe. My poor wife so often speaks of you. I felt as if I knew you; as if — I hope I was not very impertinent — I had a kind of right, almost, to come in in this unceremonious way. And there is my particular friend, General Donnington — Sir Edward Donnington he is now, you know, and very rich — a great sum, Indian prize-money.



Of course you heard. Poor fellow! He never married, and never will, I suppose. He had his romance, and his grief; I know all about that," said he, very low, looking down on the carpet.

"And he's another friend who talks to me, more than I need say, about Golden Friars, and our relations there."

Mrs. Jenner always blushed easily, and she blushed now, looking down with a faint little smile, and a gentle sigh; and she thought what a melancholy music was in Captain Torquil's voice, and what a charming person he was, and what nice simple tastes and feelings he seemed to have.

"I am thinking of getting away from town life, I'm tired of London. There is nothing on earth, I think, I should so entirely enjoy as living in a place like this—in this very place — living and dying here."

There was here a pause, as he looked pensively across the lake to the grand background of mountain.

"And," he continued, "we have had a little responsibility — a very pleasant one — thrown upon us by poor dear Alice Mildmay. You have heard of her death, of course, poor thing. She was fond of my wife, and honoured me with her confidence and good opinion, and consulted me latterly about everything, and her poor little girl, only eighteen months old, she has left in our charge; and it would be so delightful to have it here—close to you—and perhaps, sooner or later, we might induce you to take it altogether under your care. The fact is, my poor wife's miserable health would quite unfit her, except for a short time, for the anxieties and trouble of such a charge. But it would be a very ungracious thing to refuse, and for a few months, I suppose, we must submit and comply with so solemn a request, until we find — I should be so delighted if it were eventually in this house—a suitable protectress for the poor little thing. At present I have had to follow down here a person whom I wish I could describe as simply foolish — in fact, a particularly wicked and audacious woman, who has stolen the child. I detest having to punish any one — in fact, if you knew me, you would understand that it is downright torture to me, the bare idea of doing so. But that wicked woman — it is a duty one can't get over to stop such doings peremptorily; and I'm come all this way, you see, to do that. Her name is Hileria Pullen. Is she in the house?"

"No, certainly," said Mrs. Jenner, who, as the crisis seemed to approach, flushed very much, and grew plainly very uncomfortable. "I never saw her—she never was in this house."

"But the little child is; Doctor Jenner says so, and in a better place it could not possibly be," said Captain Torquil, "nor under more admirable superintendence or kinder care. You'll kindly allow me, however, to see the child, and assure myself that it is the very child, and all safe, and quite out of the hands of that wicked woman. And, being once assured upon these points, I would ask you kindly to take pity upon me, who have no servant with me capable of taking charge of the infant, and to permit it to remain here, in your kind hands, as much longer as will consist with your convenience and liking." Here was a polite and plausible speech enough. But what was that in the captain's dark greedy eye — in his thin lips, and finely-cut pallid features, that affrighted Mrs. Jenner with a sudden sense of treachery and danger!

## CHAPTER XII.

### CAPTAIN TORQUIL LEAVES THE DRAWINGROOM.

CAPTAIN TORQUIL smiled. The smile was not at all like the smile of theatrical villainy. It was intended to be genial and reassuring. He was handsome, and doing his best; yet the smile inexplicably alarmed Mrs. Jenner.

Certain shadows that had crossed his face immediately before it, had, no doubt, something to do with the sudden eclipse of the celestial Captain Torquil, and the vague revelation of a counterpart more or less infernal.

The captain, I think, saw the unpleasant change in Mrs. Jenner's mind, and he tried to restore her happier impressions.

"I see, Mrs. Jenner, we are entirely agreed as to the cruelty of punishing people, and the fact is that I should be immensely relieved if you and Mr. Jenner would join in advising me *not* to put the law in motion against her. Hileria Pullen is one of the most entirely unscrupulous persons on earth. She fancied she had got poor Mrs. Mildmay entirely in her hands. She hated me because she saw that her mistress consulted me. She fancied that I had an influence. Perhaps she was right. But if I had, the will, leaving but a miserable fifty pounds a year to my wife, shows how I used it. The woman was bitterly disappointed at the amount of her own legacy — handsome as it was. Furious with her late mistress, furious with me, furious with my poor wife, enraged at seeing her prey slip through her fingers, she framed a plan to abscond with the child. She's a woman of profound dissimulation — intensely artful and vindictive, beyond your power to conceive. I don't care a farthing, of course, what she says of me. It can't be worse than she has already said, again and again, when it suited her purpose, of her dead mistress and benefactress. I have detected her in so many and such awful untruths, that one word she utters I don't believe. In consequence of these — which justice to the memory of poor Alice Mildmay compelled me to notice — I told her she should leave our service next morning, and she ran away over night with the infant, which she had with her own ears heard poor Alice Mildmay consign, in the most solemn and passionate terms, to my care. This—and I suppose the usual cloud of slanders — she proposes for her revenge, and a mode of accounting for her abrupt departure, and perhaps ultimately of extorting money from more persons than one."

As he spoke, the lady, over whom was stealing again a mist of perplexity, raised her eyes quite suddenly, and detected those of Captain Torquil fixed upon her with an expectant look that was cunning and intense; it was triumphant, and shocked her. She returned it unconsciously with a fixed stare of fear.

The fascination of this stare continued for little more than a second. It was dispelled; but an ineffaceable lesson remained.

The lady stood up, and very coldly but pointedly asked —

"With respect to poor Alice Mildmay's child, be good enough, Captain Torquil, to say exactly what you wish?"

"I want you kindly to direct your servant to bring down the child, so as to enable me to satisfy myself by actual inspection that the child is really here. Will you do so?"

"I will not, sir."

The captain, beginning to forget his politeness, laughed a short, dangerous laugh.

"And may I ask," said the captain, his eyes beginning to gleam, and his features to grow sharper and whiter, "your reason for that particularly unsustainable resolution?"

The captain leaned a little forward as he put his question, his fingers clenched on each side upon the brim of his hat, which he held firmly to his waistcoat, while the crown was presented for the inspection of Mrs. Jenner.

He peered in her face with a look of the intensest fury, which trembled under strong momentary restraint, at the very point of explosion.

With the crisis Mrs. Jenner's courage had come. She was terrified; she was excited; she was resolute.

"I won't have the child brought down, because you might seize it and take it away. Nothing on earth will induce me to part with it until the law has determined who shall keep it. You shan't see the child, sir; and be good enough to let your visit end."

"Have you quite decided, Mrs. Jenner?"

"Quite, sir."

He bowed with a kind of shrug and a fixed smile, and backed towards the door, at which he made her another bow.

This simple lady made him one of her curtsies, fancying that he was taking his departure, and had her hand upon the bell, when it was arrested by a sound which called her instantly to the lobby.

Captain Torquil was not descending, but mounting the stairs, with long and rapid steps, and as she came out on the lobby he was striding up the second staircase.

As luck would have it, the baby was crying, and the sound too surely conducted him to the nursery door. With a loud scream the affrighted lady followed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*"I love thee, I doat on thy features so fine,  
I must and will have thee, and force makes thee mine."*

MRS. JENNER quite forgot her dignity, and actually ran up the stairs after the gentleman who was scaling them.

Had careless Kitty Bell actually locked the door? Was any one in the nursery except the darling who was bawling? What would that incensed gentleman do when he got in? Would he murder the child outright, or carry it off, swinging by the feet, as the man in the "Promessi Sposi" did the live turkeys?

A thousand dreadful conjectures whirled in the eddy of that moment through her brain, and she shrieked as she ran up —

"Kitty, lock the door; Kitty, lock the door!"

And the baby wailed; and, to her comfort, the women's voices also were heard from within.

The captain's hand was on the handle of the door, which he twisted about with a few violent jerks.

It was a clumsy oak door, with a keyhole almost as big as a modern hall-door; and Mrs. Jenner almost fainted with sudden relief when she saw that it resisted.

"Open the door," said Captain Torquil.

"Oh! no, no, no, no," cried Mrs. Jenner.

The women's voices were hushed, and in a tone of undisguised fury Captain Torquil cried again —

"Open the door!"

And Mrs. Jenner's distracted accompaniment of "No, no, oh! no, no, no, no-o-o!" resounded and quivered through staircase, hall, and passage.

The captain struck the door a furious blow with his foot; but it was none of those flimsy defences which fall down before a pop-gun; but mingled with the ba-a-a-ing of the child came now the frightened whimper of women from within. Captain Torquil recoiled three or four steps, and, with a rush, sprang with his shoulder and side against the door, and — heaven and earth! What is this?

Admirable door this is: heart of oak; solid as the wooden walls of England! Here is a lock and key strong and clumsy as Vulcan himself.

If people hold that locks and keys are necessary to their doors — and what more effectual security against the miscreant on the lobby? — it is worth seeing that the mechanism is in working order. Here the door was right, the key was right, the lock, properly so called, was right; but, alas! the iron socket that receives the bolt, which in rude fashion was there screwed to the doorpost, stripped by the worthy vicar, in an emergency when screws were wanted and not elsewhere at hand, of all its screws but one, yielded to the weight of the captain's charge, and flew in with ominous clatter among the garrison, and with a tremulous swing, door, key, and lock revolved, and the beseiger, white with rage, strode in through the breach.

Mrs. Jenner, rushing forward with her new-found motherly instincts all alive, screamed wildly; Mrs. Jolliffe, with her palms raised and fingers extended, screamed also. Kitty Bell bawled "By Jen! The deaul clake thee," and dealt the ogre a lusty thump over the head with her shut fist, which made the captain's small ears sing under the close curls of his black perfumed hair.

Captain Torquil was not accustomed to such handling, and he loosed the hold which Kitty had laid upon his collar with so little ceremony that the heroic girl spun halfway round, and sat involuntarily, with the whole force of her plump person, upon the nurse's chair of state, from which, for a moment, she gazed bewildered; while Captain Torquil, stooping at the child's bedside, before any one of the women had recovered the power of action, dived his hands under the infant.

So all seemed over-*conclamatum est*. In two seconds more the captain would have been running down the vicar's stairs with his short, vile laugh and the prize in his arms, to spring with it into the chaise, and drive from Golden Friars as fast as the whip of a bribed postboy could speed him.

But it was not to be this time. A powerful chuck at the nape of his neck whisked the captain at this critical moment backward, staggering with a good apparent likelihood of tumbling on the floor.

"Here's douce wark, clamperin' through the vicar's house!" said the stentorian bass of Tom Shackles.

If the captain had thought upon the question of odds at that moment, he would have seen at a glance that Tom was altogether too huge and sinewy to leave him a chance against that modern athlete. But Captain Torquil was for the moment beside himself with anger, and rallying, he struck with all his force at Tom's face.

The women screamed appeals to heaven at this renewal of the battle, and Tom caught the blow on his open hand; and having a vague idea that the captain was a relation of the family, and therefore to be treated with tenderness, he returned it, not with his formidable knuckles, but with the same open hand he dealt him a slap on the cheek and ear such as is happily seldom heard in a nursery; and the captain staggered against the wall, where he looked for a moment as if he was going to sleep.

"By my sang, my lad, I've a mind to gie thee a gud bevellin'," said Tom; and to the women he said, pointing to the door that opened into an inner room, "take the bam in there, and shut the door, and don't stand gapin' here; 't may be killed else."

"Give up that child!" cried Captain Torquil, again staggering forward — a manifestation which although Tom Shackles placed himself between, hurried the movements of the women, who, with the child in a hasty roll of blankets, scurried into the inner room, through the door and shut it.

At the same moment, grinning happily from ear to ear, the bluff face of Dick Wykes, who had come clanking up in shoes of four pound weight apiece to have his share of the mill, entered the nursery.

"Is thee him?" Dick inquired. "Hoot, man! Lap up! I thout there wor fower o' ye. Why, I'd thraa thee out o' t' window wi' yan hand!" said this smiling intruder, of whose speech Captain Torquil understood nothing but the goodhumoured contempt expressed in his face and demeanour.

He eyed the two Herculean fellows over. Even in his then State of mind he saw the folly of any attempt to cope with their united strength.

Mrs. Jenner stood staring wildly from the lobby on the strange scene which had for a minute or so profaned the homely roof of the vicarage. The captain looked from one Titan to the other, and collected enough sense not to make a fool of himself by fighting. He was quivering with passion nevertheless.

"You have taken the child; you've assaulted me, you-hoo-oo scoundrel! As I hope for heaven, I'll make every one of you suffer! I'll have the police here in half an hour."

He ran downstairs; he roared a curse or two at the postboy, and jumped into the chaise, and sat for a few seconds bewildered, looking first out at one window and then out at the other; and then, seeing that some idlers had collected about the vicar's door, perceiving that something odd was occurring within, he lowered the front window, and bawled to the driver —

"You go-you drive-ha, ha!-drive towards the place you came from."

And he pulled up the window, and leaned back, and stared wickedly in the faces of the people who were looking there. And Captain Torquil sped away, leaving wild and sinister impressions of himself, and no material memento of his visit except a piece of wrenched iron and his hat on the nursery floor.

Captain Torquil drove away at a great pace-it was to be supposed, in hot haste to accomplish some scheme. Of course, a man with his ear tingling from a blow, and with such a case as regarded the child, and in the state of intense exasperation in which he was, and with his hat impounded in the vicar's nursery, could hardly have gone away with threats so fierce against all parties without very resolute intentions.

But when the vicar returned after sunset to his hysterical household, the captain had not reappeared.

The vicar, like a wise governor, took prompt measures in this state of affairs. He sealed up Captain Torquil's hat in a bandbox, lest there should be litigation with respect to that property. He caused Tom Shackles to make a note of the captain's sayings and doings. He locked up the twisted iron which attested his violence, and he retained Tom as a garrison, keeping up through the night a sharp look-out in the moonlight, lest the enemy should return and attempt a surprise.

But that night passed over quietly. And the next day came and went without tidings of or from the captain, and a week or more, without even a letter from a London attorney.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AGITATIONS

THERE came an odd letter from Mrs. Torquil, to her cousin Mrs. Jenner.

It dwelt in an affectionate strain upon old recollections, and deplored the unhappy occurrences in which the name of her dear cousin at Golden Friars was involved, and which had placed her own dear husband in an attitude of, she feared, very determined antagonism to hers.

Her husband could not in the least conceive what motive actuated Mr. Jenner in sanctioning the conduct of that flagitious servant, Hileria Pullen, and in disputing his (Captain Torquil's) right to the custody of the child. That right does not rest upon the language of the will, but upon the earnest entreaty of poor Alice, conveyed, not in conversation only, but in repeated letters of a conclusive and unmistakeable kind. These, of course, would be put in evidence at the proper time. To her, nothing could have occurred more painful than that their husbands should stand mutually in such relations, especially as it had been her cherished hope and project to come down to Golden Friars, and to make it their headquarters; and so soon as the dear child had been with them a sufficient time to satisfy the solemn promises under which they were *both* bound to poor Alice, to endeavour to induce her (Mrs. Jenner) to undertake the care of the dear infant, which she felt would severely task her own strength.

All this, to her inexpressible grief, had been frustrated by the wickedness of one artful servant. Her husband was supported by a wealthy relation in the expensive-and, to Mr. Jenner she feared, the ruinous — litigation into which they were about to plunge. Her husband, Captain Torquil, was very angry; and all she implored of her dear cousin was charitably to dissociate her from the oppressive litigation which the captain was about to direct against the Reverend Hugh Jenner. She hoped to hear from her to say that she would view these miserable proceedings in the same charitable way.

This letter, somehow, produced an unpleasant effect even upon the vicar. It was so very plausible — even so alarming. He went down with it in his pocket to Mr. Tarlcot, who, with the suspicion of his craft, treated it simply as a piece of cajolery and brag — the concoction of a cunning terrorist.

"It never was she who wrote that letter, Mr. Jenner. It's not a lady's letter. That letter, sir, was written by Captain Torquil, and copied by his wife; and it satisfies me that he has no notion of going on; he has not means for such a thing. I happen to know of an execution against him for four hundred and eighteen pounds. He's in no position to throw away money; and he knew all along he had not a leg to stand on. Suppose we go down and ask Mrs. Pullen what she thinks of it?"

"But — but — don't you see, we really know nothing about this Mrs. Pullen," said the vicar.

"Don't be influenced by that letter, my dear sir. That woman is as straight as an arrow. I wish I had such a witness in Hazel and Wrangham. She's as honest as the sun."

"You understand such people better than I. I confess I thought her a most respectable person; and I'm quite sure it was this letter that made me hesitate. Let us go to the George and see her."

Mrs. Pullen was a great deal better, and sitting up, and about to set out on her travels next day.

"Well, Mrs. Pullen, what do you think of that letter?" inquired the attorney, so soon as the vicar, having read it aloud, replaced it in his pocket. "Mrs. Torquil must like writing letters, else she'd hardly write so long a one."

"Bless you, sir," said Hileria Pullen disdainfully, "the poor lady has never wrote a line of that letter. Allow me to see, sir, please, whether it is even in her handwriting. Well, yes, I know her writing," she resumed after inspection. "I think it is. But that was wrote for her — every word. She daren't write a line of any such thing of her own will — she dursn't-oh, no, no!" And she shook her head slowly with a melancholy scorn. "Why, sir, she never writes a line if she can help it; and that she dursn't write. Why, if you knewed, sir, she'd as ready put her hand in the fire as write a line of that, without she was, I may say, ordered to do it by master."

So the attorney looked and nodded gravely to the vicar, who said, returning his nod-

"Yes, I dare say you are right."

And the vicar walked away with a sense of relief — very delightful relief — in thinking that he was in no serious danger of being involved in the tremendous eddy of litigation.

Even Tom Shackles had suffered mentally under apprehensions of a similar sort, being a responsible man, and clerk of Golden Friars, and conscious of that box on the ear which he had dealt the desperate captain.

Kitty Bell, too, had given him what she called a bang on his black, curly pate, and cried serious tears at the chaff with which Dick Wykes threatened her with transportation for "walin'" a soger.

The relief was therefore general when, a fortnight having passed, nothing had occurred to corroborate the captain's threats uttered when, in Kitty Bell's phrase, "he banged out o' t'dure, and we saa na meyar on him."

But these holloing folk were not quite out of the wood yet, for, like a brief, stem clap of thunder, that made his ears ring, there came an attorney's letter from a firm in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to the vicar, demanding to be put in communication with his "solicitor."

Still Mr. Tarlcot was sceptical. He communicated, and so did the vicar by return.

## CHAPTER XV.

### LAURA MILDMAV.

So the field was clear, and battle coming.

Here was the peace of tranquil Golden Friars broken, and the world again by the ears, all by the supreme influence and waywardness of women; old Hileria Pullen's wild escapade," and good Mrs. Jenner's fancy for adopting other people's progeny; the baby itself being of the same unlucky sex.

But notwithstanding these alarms, the sceptical attorney of Golden Friars was right — nothing followed.

With the great and distant metropolis was, indeed, thus spun the one fine thread of interest that connected it with the isolation of Golden Friars, and henceforward any bit of news respecting the movements of Captain Torquil was discussed with good appetite in the drawingroom and nursery of the vicar's house, in the snuggery of Tom Shackles, in the humble dwelling of jolly Dick Wykes, and in the office of shrewd old Tarlcot from whose London correspondents, who had themselves had some unpleasant dealings with the captain, these little bits of news were derived.

I am making a little chronicle, and shall jot down all I ever heard of this captain, while in due chronological order noting, also, such occurrences as illustrate Golden Friars during the brief period of my story.

In the first place, then, without any show of opposition, the good vicar was appointed to take care of this little ward of Chancery, by the decree of that High Court. And now, *cedant arma togæ*. The vicar might snap his fingers at the captain.

He was, like some others I have heard of, a married gentleman, who, without pretending to be single, lives like a bachelor, and puts his incumbrance quite out of view, like a by-gone indiscretion and sin of his youth.

He was an Eton man, a member of good clubs, and had started well enough. His patrimony was gone, but he did not trouble any one with maunderings about that misfortune, and nobody ever asked after it. He paid his debts of honour lightly, and was one of the best dressed men about town. He lived, I dare say, on his luck and — skill.

I don't know exactly what it was, but Torquil grew to be not quite so well liked, and some men were a little shy of him, and his temper at Guildford was tremendous.

The fact is that Captain Torquil was fast caught in that vice, the winch of which is twisted tighter and tighter hourly, and whose metallic bite whitens with hell-fire. He was in the torture of debt, and, *worse*, of the frightful shifts into which that agony drives some minds.

He was in that selfish agony, quivering on the edge of despair, with just one devil's throw for it; and he threw, as we know, and lost it.

And now, in the dust and crash of a hideous ruin, Captain Torquil had vanished. After a time he turned up in Spain, where two royal pretenders were at that time campaigning and enlisting free lances.

Then Captain Torquil was wounded; a very bad wound, for it knocked his eye out.

"He was, as you know, such a handsome fellow," said the writer of the letter, "and now you never beheld such an object. A glass eye the doctor says he can't use, and I assure you it is a perfect chasm. I suppose they will stick a patch or something over it, but, so far as appearance goes, he is done for."

Shortly after came a letter to the vicar, saying that Captain Torquil's friends were, in his present forlorn state, making up a little purse for him, and trusted that, being connected with his family, he would be so good as to contribute something. The good vicar sent five pounds, and Mr. Tarlcot said that a fool and his money are soon parted.

Then it was stated that a legacy had been left him by an aunt of his, but no one seemed to know how much.

About five years after that, a letter reached the vicar's wife from Mrs. Torquil; not very long, but extremely plaintive, in which occurred this passage: "Since the death of my unhappy husband, Captain Torquil, I have suffered much distress of mind and body, if you thought your good husband who was so kind to mine, could," &c. &c.

And so it appeared, that with that fierce and selfish spirit, "life's fitful fever" was over.

Poor Mrs. Torquil, not very long after, embraced the Roman Catholic faith, and was received into a charitable institution. This event was, perhaps, the saving of her life, for she could now no longer procure alcohol.

Years had now passed, and the delights of good Mrs. Jenner's vicarious maternity seemed always increasing.

How had this little child-so windered, as Kitty Bell had said, with the blea, or, in more familiar phrase, the plae, livid complexion, the suspected gloo, or squint, and whose little figure was held, by the same authority, to be all a-cracked, or, as we say, crooked — how had this poor mishriven, blasted flower lived through this time? and what did it look like now?

"Well," said Kitty Bell, now, after the flight of eighteen years, a little less light of foot, with streaks of grey in her brown hair, and lines traced deep enough across her once smooth forehead, and others etched about her kindly eyes—"well, who'd a thought the night she came here, when I held the can'le by her poor little pined face—an ill-favvert bab it was; poisoned, the doctor said—'twould ever a chirp'd up sooa? The weeny thing we used to see snoozlin' in the weeny bed — lookin' just like as if it was going to dee — who'd a thought 'twould ever a spired up and stiffened like that? She's t' bonniest and t' cantiest lass that ever set foot in Golden Friars — and the kindest."

She was now a beautiful girl, lithe and slender, with rich brown hair, and large, long-lashed eyes of blue, and lips so crimson, and cheeks so clear, and such a pretty oval formed her face, that Laura Mildmay was really one of the prettiest creatures that ever lover dreamed of.

A little shy-with something wild and fiery in those dark eyes, proud and often sad, and sometimes merry — if you had seen her walking those mountain paths with a step like the deer's, you might have taken her for the genius of those beautiful solitudes. I am going to tell you something of this young lady, who has risen from her temporary death to this beautiful shape, to be the late-found heroine of this little tale.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SUITORS APPEAR.

IT is not to be supposed that a heroine like Laura Mildmay, even in this sublime solitude, was quite without adorers.

There were no doubt many who, for obvious reasons, never told their love. But two there were who in their different degrees were quite eligible; and in watching the movements of these rivals, good Mrs. Jenner discovered a new delight, and a perfectly novel exercise of the maternal instinct.

What good woman is there without that sort of active benevolence which the coarse world calls matchmaking? I put the question to any good lady with enough experience to answer it — is not the fact so with regard to her neighbours? And as regards herself, I inquire, is there any other construction of castles in the air so entirely absorbing, preposterous, and enchanting?

Allow me to tell in half a dozen lines something of the situation and the persons. I could easily make a volume of them, for they talked and felt, and had features and clothes, and there was a good deal of love, and some jealousy. And good Mrs. Jenner saw both sides of the question, on each of which much was to be said; and being of a nature that overflowed, with compassion her heart bled alternately for each, as the fortune of war favoured this or that pretender. Her romance was with the younger man, but the elder paid her more court, and had other points in his favour.

Among the persons who prayed every Sunday in the variegated light of the stained glass eastern windows of the church at Golden Friars, and listened to — or at least heard — Doctor Jenner's sermons, were to be seen middle-aged Sir John Mardykes and young Mr. Charles Shirley.

Sir John is a bachelor of some fifty years. There is nothing hideous about him. His height hardly attains the average of mankind, and his figure is gently oval, being plump, and the effect assisted by a cutaway coat; the outline is of the pear or peg-top form. His face is plump and oblong. He is not yet grey, and curls his small whiskers with great punctuality. His hair is close and smooth, and at top decidedly thin. He carries himself very erect, and if not elegant, is at least dapper. He is grave, but very polite to ladies, and not being quick at the interpretation of puzzles, jokes, and the like deep sayings, he is reserved, not to say suspicious, in general society, and a man of few words, as well as of few ideas.

Sir John's place, about five miles away upon the lake, is beautiful, and his rental is five thousand a year, and something more; and his ancestors can be traced about the same covers and sheepwalks for five hundred years and upwards.

Sir John's father is buried in the church, which is within ten minutes' walk of his gate. His state pew is there, and the walls are eloquent with the virtues and dignities of his ancestors. But he drives away four miles and attends the church at Golden Friars every Sunday.

Charles Shirley is quite a young fellow, not five-and-twenty, certainly handsome, tall and lithe, very goodnatured, very merry, and with always a great deal to say for himself. The Shirleys are just as old a family as the Mardykes, but the young man's rental is but a quarter of the worthy baronet's.

The young lady was, on a moderate scale, an heiress. During her minority her revenues had improved, and had now reached more than a thousand a year. The great estates of her family had, however, passed in the male line to a remote kinsman.

Stated in a gross, commercial way, the facts and figures are thus:

Miss Laura Mildmay — annual value, £1,300.

Sir John Mardykes-annual value, £5,600.

Charles Shirley — annual value, £1,400.

The young lady was still a ward of Chancery. Doctor Jenner was not sure that the sort of flirtation that was attempted might not be of the nature of a contempt. The lady, he assumed, still walked the beautiful paths of this grand solitude in maiden meditation fancy free, and he insisted on holding the suitors, during her minority, at arm's length.

The minority had now so nearly expired, that the vicar, who was punctual and orderly in all things, directed his London attorney (for our serious friend, Luke Tarlcot, was by this time sleeping soundly in Golden Friars churchyard, with a mural tablet over the family pew, containing a very handsome certificate of his virtues, the feelings of his sorrowing friends, and his own general importance) to take the best opinion procurable upon certain queries which he thought the will of her deceased mother, Mrs. Mildmay of Queen's Snedley, suggested. He also asked him to request Mrs. Torquil's attorney to submit a case on her behalf to counsel, as there was no doubt that she was by the will to succeed absolutely to the property in the event of Laura Mildmay dying unmarried before the age of thirty.

Mrs. Torquil, of whose being still alive the vicar had some doubts, years having passed without any sign from her, turned out to be alive, and a great deal better and more active than she had been twenty years before, and she seemed to have a very keen sense indeed of the value of her reversion.

"It is proper," he wrote to Mrs. Torquil's attorney, "that all these points should be clearly ascertained as promptly as may be, as I am satisfied that on Miss Mildmay's coming of age, which will be in eleven weeks from this time, she will receive more than one eligible proposal of marriage."

"Now," said he to Mrs. Jenner, holding one of the rather cunning letters of Mrs. Torquil's attorney by the corner, as he stood at the window where he had been reading it, "I see the Jesuit in all these letters. That poor woman no more inspires them than I do. She has got herself into their hands, and they want her money for a college or a mission; and do you recollect the smooth-faced man with the spectacles, and the oddly-made coat, and the collar, you know, who came down here by way of looking at the

scenery? I pointed him out to you. That gentleman came down, depend upon it, to make enquiries, and ascertain exactly what we were all about. Well were it for our church if we had one-half their activity."

All things contrary, one against the other. There was a counterpoise here; for the ecclesiastical invasion alluded to was more than compensated for by a visit promised in a letter from his admirable friend the Dean of Crutchley Abbey.

"I have made acquaintance with a charming person, a Mr. Burton, an enthusiastic church extensionist. He is about visiting the northern counties, and goes furnished with introductions. If you have any movement of that kind on foot just now, I think you will find him able and willing to give you a lift. I showed him the ground plan and elevations of our little building at Crutchley Abbey, and he instantly subscribed. He would have put himself down for fifty pounds if we had not limited our subscription, as I told you. As he is going northward, and loves the picturesque, I recommended him to visit your beautiful town, which he very likely will in a few days; and I ventured to give him a line of introduction to you, as one who could tell him where to find all that is curious and beautiful about Golden Friars."

The vicar had his secret misgivings, and his wife her private hopes that the visitor might prove a new suitor to Laura. Upon this point suspense was soon ended.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### MR. BURTON.

MR. BURTON arrived at night at the George, where he put up. He saw his landlord, and intimated his particular likings and dislikings. Also it came out that he meant to stay a few days — possibly weeks — under his comfortable roof. He inquired about the vicar, to whom he had a letter, and heard that he was well, but that Mrs. Jenner had sprained her ankle the other day in a foolish scramble among the mountains.

Mr. Burton had no servant with him, but the nature and magnificence of his correspondence more than made up for this. He had sat up writing till past eleven, and the letters which he sent down in the morning for the little postoffice struck honest Mr. Turnbull with very great respect. There was one to a Sir Somebody Something, Bart.; there were two to noble lords — peers of the realm; and there was one, big enough to require two stamps, to his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.

At the same time, no person could be more modest in his demeanour, and in all respects less a troublesome inmate than Mr. Burton.

He was affable, even chatty, with his host, who could not fail to perceive in a little time that Mr. Burton was a man in whose mind religion, though never obtruded, was always present.

He felt a very great respect, under all the circumstances, for Mr. Burton.

Shortly after breakfast, the stranger made an early call at the vicar's, being anxious to find him at home. It was a beautiful summer morning, and he stood on the vicar's steps, smiling at the noble mountains on the other side of the lake, as if they had been beloved and long-lost friends.

Mr. Burton was announced. It was a venerable man who entered the vicar's study, rather tall — not infirm — bald, but not very bald, and with the finest silken white hair, rather long, and a ruddy complexion and a smiling countenance, and a manner very gracious and urbane.

The vicar received him as a hospitable man of God should. They chatted very agreeably on all manner of subjects. The stranger seemed much interested about the state of religion in the region with which the vicar was best acquainted, and asked leave to make a note or two of some facts which he told him.

They then went out, and saw the town and the church, about which Mr. Burton, to the great delight of the vicar, became quite enthusiastic.

"It is quite a gem, a treasure, this little church. To think that we should not have known a word about it in London! You are quite right, though; your predecessors have obscured, and even injured, some parts of the building. Do you know Lord Complines?"

No, the vicar had not that honour.

"Oh! Then I must write to him myself. He's one of us. We are a little society of some fifteen people, and in the way of restoration and that sort of thing we have been doing, you'd say, a good deal. I'll write to him tonight, and tell him all about it; and when I get back to town, if you entirely approve, we'll get an architect to run down and look at it; and I can answer for it, if you'll give us leave, and aid us with advice and direction, it shall be one of the very earliest things we undertake."

The vicar was charmed with his new friend, and soon Miss Mildmay was equally pleased. This old man was so accomplished, and was, in a very pleasant way, able to interest and instruct her so very much, by new lights and curious facts and anecdotes, on the subjects she liked best, that if he had been only some thirty years younger, I think Charles Shirley and Sir John Mardyke would have suspended their mutual jealousies, and turned their united animosities upon the fortunate Mr. Burton.

The old gentleman did not care very much for dining out, but very often he dropped in to tea. Here Charles Shirley, who lived hardly two miles away from the town, very often made one of the party.

Bitter was the chagrin with which this, among other advantages attendant on the young man's proximity to Golden Friars, inspired the sensitive baronet, who lived in Mardyke Hall, four miles away, and could not, without exciting undue observation, be at all as perpetually as he liked in the purlieus of Golden Friars.

It was rather hard that Mr. Burton, the quietest of mortals, here in the seclusion of his "Happy Valley," should be involved indirectly, but very uncomfortably, in a sort of quarrel.

Mr. Burton was in church on Sunday, a pattern of attention, solemnity, and benignity, to all good church-goers.

From the Mardykes' pew, the clear and solemn accents of this venerable man, whom Sir John politely harbours, with himself, in that sanctuary, as it were dominates the responses which the clerk leads. The solemn and silvery tones were distinguishable in every nook of the church; and, indeed, from most parts of it was visible the reverend white head of that tall worshipper.

In the town, so far as he was known, he was highly esteemed. He had already made out two or three cases of poverty and suffering, which, after due inquiry, he unostentatiously relieved. It was his principle that a wayfarer, like himself, should become a citizen, in all points, during the time of his sojourn; he thus took care, that while enjoying his holiday, he did not divest himself of the charitable offices of a Christian, nor wrong the place of his temporary abode of the advantage of an inhabitant. In all matters of duty he was a little severe with himself.

He took Mr. Turnbull, of the "George and Dragon," into council, and talked over many things with him that concerned the town, and made notes of the information he obtained.

"I like the town, I like the people," he would say; "and before I take my leave, I should like to do it and you a service. You are not to talk about what I say — it is between you and me; but you want a little money down here. For instance — it's a trifle, but still, to the 'George' it is something — the little jetty and the three boats that, I am told, were at the service of the inn in old times, have disappeared, the boats altogether, and the jetty nothing but the piles left. Well, that's a pity. The town paid two-thirds of the

cost, while it was a borough, and the 'George and Dragon' one-third, in old times. But that arrangement is over and gone, and your inn has neither boats nor jetty. Now, six or seven hundred pounds would restore all that, and I'll see that the money is forthcoming. Before I leave this, I'll have people down here to look after it, and we'll make the boats the property of the inn; do you understand, for the use of the innkeeper for the time being. I'm so placed with relation to some people of influence, and with so handsome a fund to act with, that I can undertake for that and a great deal more. I'm charmed with your town. I haven't seen so pretty a thing in England, and I have only to make the proper representations to have things undertaken here, and an outlay of some six thousand pounds in improving the beauty and convenience of the place. We have been doing wonders elsewhere, and I like this better than any place I have visited. You need not mind telling the people here, you know, that anything of the kind is intended."

But in spite of all his cautions, honest Mr. Turnbull could not keep all this quite to himself, and Mr. Burton began to be looked at across the street, and even in church, with more reverence than was awarded to common mortals.

Dr. Lincote especially admired him. He had paid that physician a visit about the projected dispensary, asked many questions, and finally put down his name for two hundred pounds, which he would be happy to pay when the right time came. A letter would always reach him under cover to his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, wherever he might be, which would not be very distant, and he might reckon upon his cheque within a week after.

"He's in correspondence with the Archbishop, I know that from old Turnbull," swore Doctor Lincote, "and with half the swells in England; I tell you it was not the worst thing that ever happened for Golden Friars, Mr. Burton's coming down here; and I think you'll find he won't stop at the Dispensary!"

On this particular Sunday Mr. Burton was as devout as usual in Sir John Mardyke's pew. Devout enough for both, the worthy baronet seemed to think, for his eyes and thoughts were engaged very agreeably by a graceful figure in the vicar's pew across the aisle.

After church he walked up to the vicar's with Sir John Mardyke and beautiful Miss Laura Mildmay. On the other side walked Charles Shirley. Two rivals for supporters. The baronet looked very sulky. Did not pretty Miss Laura incline more to the younger man? Heaven send there be not a bloody hand, in earnest, in the matter!

After luncheon, Miss Mildmay went up to sit with good Mrs. Jenner. Mr. Burton and the vicar fell into talk; and the baronet and Charles Shirley, having nothing to say to one another, said goodbye to their host and departed.

When Mr. Burton, a little after, had taken his leave of the vicar, a gloom came over him, and he walked silently by the shore, not of the far-resounding deep, but of the stirless lake, in which were reflected the sky and mountains.

I can understand the strange sense of relief with which an old traveller, into whose pleasant book I lately happened to look, exclaims, on losing sight of the Alps, "Thank heaven, I have at length quite escaped from these terrible mountains!"

Very distant mountains convey no idea of the sombre fascination and awe of mountain scenery. You are barred and ribbed in by huge purple ramparts, furrowed by ravines, swelling into rocky curves, or sinking into deep murky shadow. The steep and solitary ascent mounts upward and upward still, until fainter as it soars, its summits plae into shadows, or show their white pinnacles sheeted in snow faintly against the sky.

Here, at Golden Friars, on a more contracted scale, the same influence is felt. This pretty village of many gables and steep roofs, clumped round with noble trees, among which rises eminent the grey church tower, standing at the margin of the lake, and overtopped nearly on every side by mountains near and high, has an air of solitude that is overpowering.

Those impressions, of course, lose something of their force by habit. But I have never stayed there long enough to impair them; and although the people are not wanting in cheerfulness, there is, it always seemed to me, a spirit of quietude and solemnity over the people themselves.

For me, this place has always had the glory of a paradise, but with a sense of imprisonment also. I have looked round with the thrill and elevation that brings tears to the eyes, and yet with a heart oppressed with a strange gloom. The forms and habitations of man seem to dwindle to nothing in such an amphitheatre, and looking up its huge and solitary sides, the imagination stills and quails.

Was it the effect of the scenery, or was it the shadow of a coming annoyance? Mr. Burton sat down in what seemed unusual gloom upon the trunk of a fallen tree, and leaning his chin upon his hand, looked across the lake with a darkened countenance, not like that ever cheerful benevolence which charmed the little circle of Golden Friars.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MR. BURTON IN DESHABILLE.

IT was some hours later, and a fine moonlight night. The afternoon service was long over, and what cause on earth could have induced Sir John Mardykes to mount his taxcart, and drive at the best pace of his famous trotter, Flying Dutchman, who won the wager on the Brighton road, back again at this hour all the way from Mardykes Hall to Golden Friars?

Sir John was glowering and sniffing, and purpling in the moonlight; such was his resentment as he flew along the beautiful road that winds by the margin of the lake.

A letter had reached him late that evening. It had come with others, and his servant had brought it from the neighbouring postoffice.

It was written in a vulgar hand and ill-spelled, and the story it told was this: That Charles Shirley had amused Miss Laura Mildmay less than a week before by telling her how he (Sir John) dyed his whiskers, and twisted in curl-papers so much hair as Time had left him; how his insteps were entirely composed of cotton wadding, his feet being "as flat as flounders"; how his shoulders were formed of the same material, nature having denied him any; how he was known to rouge at the race and hunt balls, and practised dancing with old Mrs. Hinchley, his housekeeper, in a deserted garret at Mardykes Hall, with a great deal more that was ridiculous and insulting; and how all this was said in presence of Mr. Burton, who could not deny it.

A two-pint pot, although it may hold many quarts of beer in succession, cannot hold more than one quart at a time. The measure of the capacity of Sir John Mardykes' head was represented by one idea. That it could hold — but not a second, without displacing the first.

Sir John was too full of his one subject to think of artificial proprieties—to think of anything else, in fact.

Up the stairs of the George he trotted, hot and serious, and, with the ceremony of a knock, but without waiting for an answer, he opened Mr. Burton's door and walked in, saying —

"How d'ye do, Mr. Burton—how do you do, sir? I — ohl."

Sir John stopped short in the middle of the room.

It was Mr. Burton's habit to lock his door when he came up for the evening. He could have sworn he had done so on this occasion. But Homer nods—and Mr. Burton had palpably neglected to turn his key as usual in his door.

He was sitting with his dressing-gown on, in an easy-chair, with a bottle of brandy and some water, and a glass before him; a half-smoked cigar-smouldered between his fingers, and a pair of candles burned on his table. But Sir John was a good deal startled.

Mr. Burton's teeth were gone, and his left eye was out, and a deep ugly hole was in the place of that organ. He had screwed his mouth into a grim grimace, and his face looked ever so broad, and ever so short.

His whole face was crimson with the fire of brandy, not brandy-and-water, for the aroma was fiercer than even moderate dilution would account for. His lips were pursed and working, as they will over toothless gums. The blank eye puzzled the baronet, and the other pierced him with a gleam of fire.

On the dressing-table close by were two tumblers of water, in one of which were Mr. Burton's teeth, and in the other his glass eye.

The loss of these unsuspected auxiliaries made a very disconcerting change in Mr. Burton's appearance — a transformation, indeed, that absolutely astounded Sir John Mardykes; and perhaps the discovery a little abashed and irritated the stranger, who, still staring hard at the baronet, rose, and both remained for some seconds silent.

"I'm afraid I've somehow put my foot in it, sir," said Sir John bluntly; "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Burton, that I should have interrupted you."

"You have interrupted nothing, sir. I don't know what you mean. I intend, if you allow me, to go on with my cigar; and my doctor tells me I must sip a little brandy-and-water. Will you try a cigar? or will you take a little brandy-and-water? or may I tell them to bring a little sherry and a biscuit?"

Was it fancy, or was it the loss of Mr. Burton's teeth? It seemed to the baronet that that excellent man was speaking ever so little thickly.

"You're very good, but — no, thank you very much, nothing. I came — I was very anxious — to say a few words; but I'm afraid I'm rather in your way; am I?"

"Dear me, Sir John, not in the least. I hope I should be found always ready to confess any infirmity; but personal infirmities I can't conceive any one's being ashamed of. For the sake of articulation I use those things over there, and to prevent my being quite shocking to my friends, I use the glass eye. I lost my eye in a trifling accident in a railway carriage, on my way to our great and interesting meeting about the Jewish mission. Looking out of the window, a particle of iron, hardly so large as the point of a pin, flew into my eye. I neglected it, an ulcer formed, the cornea was perforated, and—and the thing was done. It is a comfort, Sir John, we know that everything is ordered, and all for the best, for those who rest their hopes where alone is safety, and peace, and happiness. Won't you sit? (he placed a chair for his visitor), and can I be useful in any way?"

Mr. Burton, who had been fidgeting about the room, had by this time got to the door.

"You don't object, Sir John, to my making this a little more-more—" and he bolted the door. "I usually do. I don't care to be surprised in my — ha! ha! hai-déshabille by the waiters and people of the house."

"You're very good, sir — very kind. I shan't detain you long. I — this thing reached me, Mr. Burton, and I don't mind it — not much — but I thought I might as well show it to you."

And he handed him the letter from "Felix Friendly," and Mr. Burton took it, and using his spectacles like an eyeglass, applied a lens to his extant eye, and read the paper through, his lips pursing and working as he did so, and Sir John watching these

indications from the seat of vision. The living eye was turned away from him, and nothing but the sunken crater to speculate upon.

When he had finished the letter, lowering the hand which held it to the table with a little emphasis, and directing a vivid glance which showed a good deal of the white eyeball across the bridge of his nose, upon Sir John, he said, a little sternly —

“And who the — who on *earth* can this person be, who takes the liberty of mixing my name up in a local affair of this nature? But no, I shan’t allow myself to be ruffled by it. Naturally a hot-tempered man, Sir John, I am thankful that I have learned to watch over and to resist my impulses.”

He returned the letter with a slight bow. Sir John took it, but did not put it up.

“But, Mr. Burton, you know, sir—don’t you see? I can’t let it rest so. I came here, sir, in consequence of it. I came to ask, is it so? I want to know, Mr. Burton, whether the letter says fact or no?”

Sir John was excited, red, and a little confused; but still his one idea filled his head with great stolidity.

“Sir John, you are a man of the world, too sensitive of ridicule, and if you will, contempt. Why not imitate me? My personal infirmities, wherever discovered, have been laughed at. It has troubled me little, my thoughts are elsewhere. Your view is directed too much upon the level of earth. Why not, Sir John, look a little more on and up-on and up?”

“But, a—aw, that’s all very well about a fellow’s religion, or his soul; but this, don’t you see, is about my *person*; and, zounds—I beg your pardon, but really, it *is*, you know, a sort of thing a fellow can’t afford to — to — to — and, in short, I have a right to know—

“Dear me! how unfortunate! Don’t you see, my dear Sir John, how likely such a thing is to produce ill-feeling? Why should you ask me?”

“*Why* — whaw — haw — aw — eh, don’t you see? Because — you happen to *know*, and I don’t see why you should be ashamed or afraid to say the truth.”

“The truth? Ha, yes, you have me there, Sir John. Ay, you *have*. Dear, dear, dear! I do so wish I had my dear friend Marvel here, he always takes so clear, simple, and decided a view of duty. He *is* such a guide; but I think I know what he would say. He’d say, as he always does, ‘Truth first, consequences afterward’; especially where, as here, worse consequences would probably follow upon silence. But—oh, shame that such things should be!”

“Whaw—aw — *what* things?” demanded the baronet.

“Anonymous informers—spies — traitors. Sir, you must kindly promise that you will not mention my name, should you ever speak upon this subject to any one.”

“Certainly not, Mr. Burton — not the least occasion. But is that — that *tissue* “ — and he knocked the back of his disengaged fingers upon the letter, with a reddening face— “that — that, is it true, sir — is it *true*, Mr. Burton?”

“Well, Sir John, as you put it to me that way — and most distressing it is — I’ll tell you. It *is* true — the statement is *true*, but it was most unjustifiable, and it must have come from some extremely low person; and great allowances are to be made for a young man so much in love and so much alarmed at rivalry, and so anxious to enlist the young lady’s feeling of elegance and sense of ridicule in his favour. They all do it. Pray, let there be no more said about it.”

The baronet was staring at him with very goggle eyes and a purpling face, and before he could speak, seemed to swallow down a big bit of hot bread.

He cleared his voice, and said —

“Thank you, thank you very much. It’s all plain sailing now.”

“And it is a foolish affair,” said Mr. Burton. “You’ll not think of it—I may *tell* him so?”

“You may tell him, with my compliments, he’s a blackguard and a liar!”

“Sir!”

“That is, of course, I mean any one may tell him, and I shall be very much obliged.”

“But, dear Sir John Mardykes, surely you’ll modify these dreadful terms, which include everything? You will withdraw them, I am very sure?” pleaded Mr. Burton.

“I think he’s all that, sir. Mr. Burton, I hold to it! and I think he’s a coward, sir, beside — a nasty dog, sir — a sneak and a coward, Mr. Burton, and — and I shouldn’t the least wonder if he had prejudiced me.”

“Oh, you’ll sleep on it, Sir John. Do you stay here?”

“No, sir; I’m going home.”

“You’ll look in at the vicar’s house?”

“Straight home — certainly not. I’m going home, sir. I—I — know what I think. Good night, Mr. Burton,” he added, stopping suddenly at the door—he had nearly omitted that courtesy. “I may have a talk with the vicar tomorrow — a shabby scoundrel! I’m off, Mr. Burton. Good night, sir.”

“And you kindly don’t mention my name, Sir John?”

“Certainly not. Farewell, Mr. Burton.”

“Heaven bless you!” said Mr. Burton, very kindly. And bolting his door again, he swallowed what remained of the brandy he had been sipping, and looked from his window and saw the baronet drive away at a very hard pace back again towards Mardykes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MR. BURTON MEDIATES.

IN five minutes more, good Mr. Burton having quite recovered his eye and his teeth, and looking very much as usual, only a little more florid, was walking in the moonlight by the margin of the lake, smiling in a luxury of contemplation across its luminous surface, toward those sublime headlands that rise like phantoms, built up of aerial shadow and light, into the sky.

He paused now and then, with his hands raised a little in a sort of silent worship.

The vicar's windows were open, and from the drawingroom faintly came voices and laughter pleasant to hear.

The edge of the lake is not many yards away from the road that passes the front of the vicar's house, and from the window the vicar's voice called to him, and the maid came running down with a message asking him to join their little tea-party.

Mr. Burton complied. Candles were lighted there, and the moon shone in at the open windows, through which the glorious prospect showed like the unsubstantial scenery of an enchanted land.

Quaint and clumsy as was this old stone house, the drawingroom looked positively elegant; such is the effect of a profusion of flowers, and the presence of so beautiful a girl as Laura Mildmay, who sat in the window, oddly lighted in part by the moon, in part by the candles—a study for the painter. Charles Shirley was there, chatting very gaily, and supremely happy. Mrs. Jenner was not yet in the drawingroom. She was better, and old Mrs. Twiss was paying her a visit in her bedroom.

The conversation was, I suppose, about as clever as other conversations in like circumstances, and I never heard more of it than this, that Mr. Burton said—

“To-day, Miss Mildmay, walking on that ridge that you see in that direction, I discovered several specimens of the beautiful little flower” — and he named its name, which I forget— “that you so wished to light upon; and I, old as I am, climbed a little critical bit and got one, which, however, was afterwards spoiled in my hand as I got over the fence. I intended it for your book; but you are such an enthusiastic botanist, and know what the mountains are so well, that perhaps you would like to make that your tomorrow's ramble, and permit an old fellow, but a good pedestrian, to act as your guide. It is very rare, as you know. I have not found six specimens in all my mountain rambles in England.”

Miss Laura's pretty face lighted up so at the news, that the sight was more than sufficient reward for Mr. Burton's little gallantry.

Certainly she would go-delighted, and so very much obliged.

Handsome Charles Shirley looked at the vicar. That good man, but prudent, knew what was in his mind; but, like a wise man, the vicar leaned to Sir John Mardykes, who could not be old, of course, for did not the vicar remember him in short frocks, and trousers made of pea-green jean—a hideous costume, which had impressed his memory—and in all other respects was he not immensely to be preferred? The vicar, therefore, looked a little sternly at the mountain at the other side of the lake, and Charles knew that there would be danger in his proposing to be of the party.

“No one treads a mountain path as you do,” said the old gentleman gallantly to the pretty girl. “It is a beautiful accomplishment, that of walking with grace. The Spanish ladies have it—the gipsies often have it—Taglioni had it. But our English women, as a rule, they don't walk—they stump. When one's eye has become accustomed to the true nymph-like tread, it is positively shocking to see the other thing. I involuntarily contract my foot as one of them pounds by.

“My wife walks a hillside very gracefully,” said the good vicar.

I wish kind Mrs. Jenner could have heard his little interpolation. She would have remembered it a long time, and often thought of it, and often, mayhap, as she did with other little admiring sentences, asked the beloved vicar, with a smile, if he remembered having said one evening, so-and-so. And, indeed, it is well to speak out these honest little compliments that are so sweet to remember. Don't let them die untold in the love where they sound like music, never forgotten, and the heart they have made to tremble with an exquisite and untold delight, will soon enough be cold. These little sayings are treasured and found again, long after, among the pages of the past, like a violet given by a beloved hand, when the book is opened.

“No doubt,” said Mr. Burton, “Miss Mildmay is a relation, you told me, and nothing is more characteristic of a family than their mode of walking. There is something indescribably delightful in walking the heights of mountains,” he continued, modifying his theme a little. “When I was young I never lost an opportunity, and, on a grander scale, once, for I was one of the few young Englishmen who, as they say, made the ascent of Mont Blanc. But I am an old fellow, now. I can't do much; still I find myself strong enough for these fells, as we call them here.”

“In that case, Mr. Burton, you are strong enough for anything,” said the vicar.

Mr. Burton laughed and shook his head.

“No, no; I speak of fair walking upon the heather; but when I remember what I used to do in the Highlands long ago, and look at the things that pull me up, now, I see the difference.

I can't climb anything. I'm no longer a mountaineer. I'm just a good up-hill pedestrian for a fellow of my years. But I dare no more follow Miss Mildmay's lead upon those hills now, than she could have followed mine five-and-twenty years ago on the Alps.”

The conversation then turned on something else; we need not follow it.

And now the hour had come for “prayers,” and the worthy man assembled his little household, and opened the ponderous Bible and the little book of “family prayer.” Mr. Burton closed his lids devoutly, over his live eye and his glass one, of which latter no soul at Golden Friars suspected anything, except Sir John Mardykes, who had by chance seen the ugly chasm behind it.

And when they had risen, the benignant, florid old man smiled till his teeth, that Sir John had seen in the tumbler, glimmered in the moonlight as he arranged an hour with Miss Mildmay for their next day's floral ramble; and then he prayed “Heaven bless

her," and kindly shook the vicar's hand, and smiled round the room, and begged to be remembered to Mrs. Jenner, "though that is a little unreasonable, I fear, as I have not yet had the honour of being introduced," he added.

He and Charles Shirley passed down the steps together, and paused for a moment at the piers of the outer gate, looking at the sublime picture before them, and each thinking of something totally different.

The young man stole a glance over his shoulder at the house he was leaving. His heart was heavy with an untold care, and the vagueness and darkness of the future made him sigh.

"Too early for you to sigh, and so deeply, my young friend," said the old man gently, with an old man's privilege. "I had something on my mind — shall we walk this way?—but I hesitated to say it. Somehow, that sigh has decided me. It is only a word of caution. May I speak it?"

Charles Shirley looked in his face, doubtful whether he had heard him aright. He had scarcely an acquaintance with Mr. Burton. It seemed odd his proposing to make a warning confidence.

"Certainly, very much obliged," said the young man.

"You are going to be put in a very disagreeable position, I'm afraid," said Mr. Burton.

"May I ask how, sir?" inquired Charles Shirley.

"You have incurred the displeasure of a gentleman who, I'm afraid, means to call you to account," said Mr. Burton.

"I! I have not an idea. Do you mean a hostile message?" inquired Charles smiling.

"I should not wonder," said the old gentleman in a low tone, "come a little this way, please. You have drawn down upon you the resentment of Sir John Mardykes."

"I don't mean, sir, to take any step to conciliate Sir John Mardykes"; said Mr. Shirley. "I don't understand what he can possibly mean; and I don't care a farthing."

"It seems to me, however, if you allow me to say so, that you ought. Let us get a little nearer to the lake: how beautiful it is!—you ought to apologise to Sir John Mardykes—you ought indeed."

"Apologise! I don't see what you mean," said Charles, with a start, a little sharply.

"What I mean is to prevent unpleasantness."

"There is none whatever, sir," said the young man.

"Believe me it is coming, though, unless you do as I say."

"This is certainly something new," said Charles, with a slight uncomfortable laugh.

They were walking now very slowly on the margin of the lake, over which the moonlight was trembling.

"You have enemies in this part of the world, I'm afraid, Mr. Shirley. Some mischievous person overheard, and has reported to Sir John Mardykes, some inconsiderate expressions you employed one evening when you and I and Miss Mildmay were sitting at the drawingroom window up there; and there were some fellows, I quite forget who, talking to Mr. Jenner — a clerk and some one else, and two servants bringing in tea and things. I remember, for I ventured once or twice to talk about something else; but unfortunately, as it now seems, you went on — some fun about his dyeing his whiskers, and I don't know what else; and his informant was good enough to refer him to me for confirmation of his story — the whole thing is so low and disgusting! But he put it on me as a matter of *truth* — and, in fact, he got me into a corner, for I found that my silence was confirming him in the belief that every syllable he had recounted had been literally uttered by you, while in reality what you said was comparatively harmless. So as he was extremely angry, I thought it best to be frank. I could not help admitting what was true; but the greater part of his information, I assured him, was utterly false."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged, and very sorry you should have had any trouble on my account. But I'll tell you frankly, I don't care one farthing what Sir John Mardykes thinks about me; and I should not myself have walked from this to the lake there to undeceive him. I think him a stupid old ridiculous fool. I really forget what I said of him, but I'll say that, and everything else I believe of him, with pleasure, and fifty times more, so that he need not employ spies to listen, if he wants to hear all I think of him."

"Come, come, my dear Mr. Shirley, surely you can't think this either wise or Christian. Oh! my dear young friend, let me entreat — don't you know to what a situation you may be reduced? Sir John can look back thirty years, to his early manhood; in those days I can tell you gentlemen were only too ready to appeal to the pistol, and I never saw a man more angry. I assure you the language he used is still painfully ringing in my ears."

"He spoke of *me*, did he?"

"Why, to be sure he did."

"Not in a very complimentary way, I suppose."

Mr. Burton shrugged, and then sighed with a "heigh-ho!" as if he were tired of the world.

"I suppose he said I did not speak truth?" said Charles.

"I should have no hesitation in telling you what he said, because it would show you how very threatening it is, and on what uncomfortable ground you stand; but I should insist on your giving me your word of honour that my name should not be mentioned in the matter, nor any allusion to the circumstance."

"Oh, sir, I should not dream of such a thing."

"Well, sir, he did say something to that effect, and a great deal more that it pained me to hear, and which I mention only to show you that the matter is becoming serious, and to support my entreaty that you will, just like a frank Christian gentleman, beg his pardon, for he has termed you, among other things, a liar, a blackguard, and a fool — from which you will gather how transported he is with anger, and how likely this miserable misunderstanding is to be carried into consequences that are direful and sinful; and I may add that he is likely to repeat those phrases, or their equivalents, where you would least like to have them heard. Now do, I implore, my dear young friend, do humble your proud heart a little; ask his forgiveness, and allow me to enjoy the happiness and the blessing of the peacemaker."

"Did he ask you to tell me all that?" said the young man.

"I can't say that he did; but I may tell you that I think he would wish you to know exactly how he feels."

“I see,” said the young man, with a little laugh, and throwing a pebble that was in his fingers a yard or two into the water.  
“Thank you very much. I think I must get home. Shall I walk with you to your hotel?”  
“You are very good. No, thanks. I’ll say goodnight-and all will be well and happy, I hope. Good night.”  
And so they parted. And there hung over that quiet scene the cloud of coming battle.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A GHOST STORY.

WHEN Laura Mildmay ran upstairs, after prayers, to sit a little and talk with Mrs. Jenner; she found that old lady still in her chair, and good Mrs. Jolliffe in the room.

Twenty years have passed since you last saw Mrs. Jolliffe's tall slim figure. She is now past seventy, and can't have many milestones more to count on the journey that will bring her to her long home. The hair has grown white as snow, that is parted under her cap, over her shrew'd, but kindly face. But her figure is still straight, and her step light and active.

She has taken of late years to the care of adult invalids, having surrendered to younger hands the little people who inhabit cradles, and crawl on all-fours. Those who remember that goodnatured face among the earliest that emerge from the darkness of nonentity, and who owe to her their first lessons in the accomplishment of walking, and a delighted appreciation of their first babblings and earliest teeth, have "spired up" into tall lads and lasses, now. Ay, by'r lady, and some of them shew streaks of white by this time, in the brown locks, "the bonny gouden" hair, that she was so proud to brush and shew to admiring mothers, who are seen no more on the green of Golden Friars, and whose names are traced now on the flat grey stones in the churchyard.

So time is ripening some, and searing others; and the saddening and tender sunset hour has come; and it is evening with the kind old north-country dame, who nused pretty Laura Mildmay, who now stepping into the room, smiles so gladly, and throws her arms round the old woman's neck, and kisses her twice.

"Now, this is so lucky!" said Mrs. Jenner, "you have just come in time to hear a story."

"Really! That's delightful."

"Na, na, od wite it! no story, ouer true for that, I sid it a' wi my aan eyen. But the bam here, w'ould not like, at these hours, just goin' to her bed, to hear tell of freets and boggarts."

"Ghosts? The very thing of all others I should most like to hear of."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Jenner, "if you are not afraid, sit ye down here, with us."

"She was just going to tell me all about her first engagement to attend a dying old woman," says Mrs. Jenner, "and of the ghost she saw there. Now, Mrs. Jolliffe, make your tea first and then begin."

The good woman obeyed, and having prepared a cup of that companionable nectar, she sipped a little, drew her brows slightly together to collect her thoughts, and then looked up with a wondrous solemn face to begin.

Good Mrs. Jenner, and the pretty girl, each gazed with eyes of solemn expectation in the face of the old woman, who seemed to gather awe from the recollections she was summoning.

The old room was a good scene for such a narrative, with the oak-wainscoting, quaint, and clumsy furniture, the heavy beams that crossed its ceiling, and the tall four-post bed, with dark curtains, within which you might imagine what shadows you please.

Mrs. Jolliffe cleared her voice, rolled her eyes slowly round, and began her tale in these words:

### MADAM CROWL'S GHOST.

"I'm an aid woman now; and I was but thirteen, my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o' one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe waitin' to take me and my box up to Applewale.

"I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the 'shay that's what we used to call it — and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a goodnatured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt's room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night, and I ate the apples, lookin' out o' the shay winda.

"It's a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on 'em on the tap o' the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"'Ho, then,' says one of them, 'you'll not be long there!' 'And I looked at him as much as to say 'Why not?' for I had spoken out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I hed to say.

"'Because,' says he, 'and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see — she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?'

"'Yes, sii,' says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the piint's too sm?ll for my aid eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

"'As I looked up at him saying 'Yes, sir,' I thought I saw' him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"'Well,' says he, 'be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the aid girl's claws aff ye.'

"And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the aid lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consams, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heait sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stand very thick and big, as aid as the aid house almost, and four people, with their arms out and fingertips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

"Well my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the fiist view o' the great house; and all at once we pulled up in front of it.

"A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down in front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the



little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulded across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t'rooms was locked up.

"My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this the great house afoore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl, that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

"My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

"The squire — his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson — came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applewale House.

"I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding; but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

"Mrs. Wyvern — Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me — was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always goodhumoured and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

"She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was goodhumoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt — children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story — though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

"My aunt took me into her bedchamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first she patted me on the shouther, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father, her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids.

"It was a hard sayin' the first time I set my foot in her room, I thought.

"When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room — very comfortable, yak (oak) all round — there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

"While I was still at my tea my aunt went upstairs to see Madam Crowl.

"She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake,' says Mrs. Wyvern. 'Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters — that was my aunt's name — 'is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out 'o t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be.'

"How old, ma'am?' says I.

"Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone,' says she; and she laughed. 'And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt-mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all.'

"And what's to be my business about her, please, ma'am?' says I.

"About the old lady? Well,' says she, 'your aunt Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome.'

"Is she deaf, ma'am?"

"No, nor blind,' says she; 'as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the king's court, or the affairs of the nation.'

"And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go.'

"Yes; she's gone.'

"What for?' says I again.

"She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose,' says she.

'I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child.'

"And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?' says I. "'It ain't no harm to ask that,' says she. 'She's torflin a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage.'

"In comes my aunt, and begins talkin' 'to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bedpost hangin' up inside.

"What's that you're at, child?' says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. 'What's that in your hand?'

"This, ma'am?' says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. 'I don't know what it is, ma'am.'

"Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gev me a sizzup. But she did gie me a shake by the shouther, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, 'While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye,' and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi' a bang and locke d it fast.

"Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly, in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

"The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', 'Tut, the child meant no harm — come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed.'

"My room, mind ye, was upstairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room, and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

"The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and at other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said, in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was oldfashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

"Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

"There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

"The doctor come twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

"So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

"I would a liked to see the aid lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a' bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

"When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the aid lady talking.

"It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

"I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits."

"Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

"And my aunt med answer again: 'Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?'

"I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old AEsop's Fables, I was aware o' something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"Hish! says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: 'Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i' noo — me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she'll be sleepin' in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room.'

"And with that away she goes.

"I kep' looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin' every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an' I began whisperin' to the pictures and talkin' to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin' feared in that big room.

"And at last up I got, and began walkin' about the room, lookin' at this and peepin' at that, to amuse my mind, ye'll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madam Crowl's bedchamber.

"A grand chamber it was, wi' a great four-poster, wi' flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin', and foldin' down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin'-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o' light.

I counted twenty-two wax candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

"I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, 'Why couldn't I ha' a keek at the aid lady herself in the bed?'

"Ye'd think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn't peep now I might wait many a day before I got so gude a chance again.

"Well, my dear, I came to the side o' the bed, the curtains bein' close, and my heart a'most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-stean in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! 'twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o' her head, and, wow!-was ever such wrinkles?-and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and thae she lay proud and stark, wi' a pair o' clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as ninepins. Lawks! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o' her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin' and dribblin' before the lookin'-glass, wi' a fan in her hand, and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it ever a bin the fashion for grit fowk to war their fingernails so?

"Well, I think ye'd a-bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, nor take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes, and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her old wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

"Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfulest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!"

"If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

"I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

"I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the aid lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

"I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heared the ale lady's words.

"Say them again,' says she.

"So I told her.

"Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff.'

"And did ye say she killed a boy?' says she.

"Not I, ma'am,' says I.

"Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two older women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi' her.

"It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crawl that I did not know before.

"She being young, and a great beauty, full seventy year before, hed married Squire Crawl, of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine years old.

"There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one momin'. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper's cottage and breakfast wi' him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening; and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin' there, or paddlin' about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi' him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathom that grows thar to this day, and 'twas thought he was drowned bathin'. And the squire's son, by his second marriage, with this Madam Crawl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in far the estates. It was his son, the aid lady's grandson, Squire Chevenix Crawl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

"There was a deal o' talk lang before my aunt's time about it; and 'twas said the stepmother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the aid squire, wi' her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks' minds.

"I'm going to tell ye noo about what I sid wi' my own een.

"I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the aid lady took her last sickness.

"The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o' madness, as she did fifteen years befoore, and was bucked up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin I sid in the closet, off my aunt's room.

"Well, she didn't. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin', torflin', quite enough, till a day or two before her flittin', and then she took to rabblin', and sometimes skirlin' in the bed, ye'd think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o' the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she'd fall on the flure, wi' her aid wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin' still for mercy.

"Ye may guess I didn't go into the room, and I used to be shiverin' in my bed wi' fear, at her skirlin' and scraffiin' on the flure, and blarin' out words that id make your skin turn blue.

"My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

"T' sir was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin', and a' was over, and old Dame Crawl was shrouded and coffined, and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t' sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o' her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o' us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin'. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

"I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crawl's chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

"The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi' yak pennels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na muir o' that wark, was put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin' o' many things in her chamber ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

"The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin' of a' at hame, and my sister Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn't sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

"Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin' on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o' the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin' from the wall, was dancin' up and down on the ceilin' beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head over my shoulther quick, thinkin' something must a gone a' fire.

"And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o' the aid beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin', wi' her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. 'Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin'. She was drivin' on right for me, wi' her aid shrivelled hands crooked as if she

was goin' to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi' a blast o' cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in aid times, wi' a door open wide, and her hands gropin' in at somethin' was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyin', and I standin' at the far side o' the bed; I don't know how I got there, and I found my tongue at last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin' down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern's door off t' hooks, and frighted her half out o' wits.

"Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi' the first light, down wi' me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

"Well, my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought, she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

"Hed the appearance a key in its hand?"

"Yes," says I, bringin' it to mind, 'a big key in a queer brass handle.'

"Stop a bit," says she, lettin' go ma hand, and openin' the cupboard-door. 'Was it like this?' says she, takin' one out in her fingers, and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

"That was it," says I, quick enough.

"Are ye sure?" she says, turnin' it round.

"Sart," says I, and felt like I was gain' to faint when I sid it. "Well, that will do, child," says she, saftly thinkin', and she locked it up again.

"The squire himself will be here to-day, before twelve o'clock, and ye must tell him all about it," says she, thinkin', 'and I suppose I'll be leavin' soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can.'

"Fain was I, ye may guess at that word.

"My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crawl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years aid. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

"My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I dam't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there's na sic a thing as a be or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye doyv'n and tell all about it from first to last.'

"Well, so soon as I med an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"I mind the place well. In old Sir Olivur's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he telt me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot.'

"Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

"There was an aid empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed, a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"Ha!" says he, wi' a queer smile, 'this looks like it.'

"It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang shriek, the bolt went back and he pulled the door open.

"There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

"When my aunt had lighted the candle, the squire held it up and stept in.

"My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"Ha! ha!" says the squire, steppin' backward. 'What's that? Gi' ma the poker-quick!' says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened aid wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"By Jen!" says my aunt, as, puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, 'hae a care, sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!'

"But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a sword, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

"'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull, as it lay on the floor.

"Young as I was, I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"A dead cat!" says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. 'We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present,' says he, pattin' my shouther wi' his hand.

"And he did gimma a goud pound, and I went off to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stagecoach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I niver sid Dame Crawl o' Applewale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-ter. But when I was grown to be a woman, my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was na doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen, that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin' cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water's edge, whoever did it, to mak' belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a' ran into a snuff o' dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o' jet buttons, and a knife with a green heft, together wi' a couple o' pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I

suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o' the light. And there was, amang the squire's papers, a copy o' the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the aid squire thought he might 'a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi' him, and that his buttons were o' cut jet. Sa that is a' I hev to say consamin' aid Dame Crawl, o' Applewale House."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE MEETING.

NEVER did morning dawn more glorious. There was just cloud enough in the still sky here and there to dapple the steep sides of the towering mountains, and to give to the face of some bold projection a character of gloom and menace.

At the appointed time Mr. Burton stood at the outer gate, raised his hat from his snow-white hair, and smiled at the young lady in the drawingroom window, who, smiling in return, ran down to join him.

"It is so kind of you, Mr. Burton," she said, as she came down the steps, "to take all this trouble; and the walk will be, I'm afraid, so tiresome to you who took it only on Saturday. It's too goodnatured of you."

"If I were a younger man I should now make ever so many pretty speeches," said Mr. Burton; "I shall only answer, however, that it is to me an ever new delight scaling those magnificent hills. I never could tire of them, and I can honestly say, beside, that your society will greatly add to the charm of the walk. Richard Wyke's boat is waiting, and once at the other side, the distance is really nothing. By-the-bye, have you got your little tin case to put the flowers in?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, everything."

So they went on their way chatting together very cheerfully, for she felt quite at ease in the society of this kind, communicative, and accomplished old man.

The row across the lake was delightful, and the village of Golden Friars from this point of view, diminished but distinct in the distance, with its new background of mountain, and the lake in front, and its dark elms standing in groups or singly about the oldfashioned gables, presents a singularly picturesque feature in the landscape.

And now, chatting pleasantly, the old man with his stick in his hand, and the young lady listening to his stories about foreign flowers, and Alpine, Pyrenean, and Himalayan wonders, ascended the foot of the mountain that rises from the very margin of the lake, and they crossed the little shingle road—as old, possibly, as the days of the Picts—that coils its way over the hills; and by its side they walked on, and though, ascending, still pretty nearly parallel to the margin of the lake. The mountain grows steeper from that base as they proceed.

Thus, in good Mr. Burton's phrase of the evening before, 'on and upward' they proceeded at a gentle pace, ascending above the sounds of life — its sights, also, growing perceptibly more remote, as they entered a lighter and breezier air. The bold mountain side rose steep at their right, and with a gentler declivity slanted down to the water.

The old man laughed at himself and shook his head, but he confessed that for the first time since his arrival at Golden Friars he began to feel the mountains a little too much for him, and now and then, asking Laura Mildmay's leave, he sat down for a minute or two on the roadside bank to rest.

"We old fellows, we find it out, sometimes suddenly, we are not quite what we were. On Saturday — it seems so ridiculous I should be so easily knocked up now — I could have walked to the very top of the mountain and over it, with more ease than I have accomplished this little walk. *You* are not a bit tired. I'm quite ashamed; but now I'm at your command again. Suppose we go on."

So on they went.

A few hundred yards below the point at which they had crossed this old road—if anything so narrow and inartificial deserved to be called so—the hill, shelving a little, forms a level platform, in diameter about a hundred yards. With no floral purposes, and by no means in search of the picturesque, quite another party, consisting of five gentlemen, were assembled, and a little encampment of traps — three of these-and horses, and one vehicle, nondescript, with C springs, which had conveyed the doctor from Dingham. There were servants with these horses and vehicles, which were screened from the little green area on which the gentlemen were assembled by a projecting bank, overgrown with birch and whitethorn.

No more convenient or secluded spot for a duel could have been selected, and should a combatant happen to be wounded, there was the very gentle descent of the road from this point, on the level turf, beside which a carriage might run as softly as over the pile of half a dozen Turkey carpets.

Outside this little knot of persons, not a human being anywhere, except perhaps one, suspected an assemblage of gentlemen for any purpose, much less this, upon the green platform I have described, and which, lying in a gentle hollow, was fenced from distant View. This place, for its facilities of access and departure, was selected by shrewd old Doctor Jollock, who, when affairs of this kind were more frequent, had acquired a serviceable experience.

My reader and I have lighted upon them at a critical moment. That trying interval spent by the seconds in discussing and determining arrangements was passed. Each had accomplished the process of loading the "saw-handles," which the principals were about to level one at the other. The empty cases were on the ground—Sir John Mardykes' heirloom, made of rosewood, inlaid with brass, an extremely pretty article; and, indeed, we see no reason, observing the amount of decoration expended upon coffins by fashionable undertakers, why these other cases of death should not also borrow something from our sense of the beautiful and the elegant.

Another case, just as grizzly, lay also upon the sward a little apart. It was that which contained honest Doctor Jollock's surgical instruments. The doctor himself stood by — his jolly port-wine complexion bleached to yellow by the suspense — for the decisive moment had come. The stout little baronet, in a green "cutaway" coat, with gilt buttons, a hat exquisitely brushed, and Wellington boots, that shone intensely in the sun, was standing in the spot where his "friend" had just placed him, with a pistol already in his hand, looking very pale and glowering.

About twelve steps away stood Charles Shirley, receiving a word or two, spoken low, from his second—a tall, slight, elderly gentleman, with a rather red sharp nose, and a resolute and important air, and his coat buttoned across his chest. His nose was near Charles's ear as he whispered, and he held a pistol in each hand, with the butt uppermost. And now he retires backward

about a dozen steps, and takes his handkerchief from his pocket. The baronet's second, a short, plump man, with a short high nose, and a double chin, an eyeglass and a white hat, stood at the other side.

Doctor Jollock, a little in the second's rear, stands motionless, with his lips tightly screwed together, and frowning hard, as if he expected a box on the ear — staring breathless and still on the combatants.

"Gentlemen, are you both ready?" cries the second, with the handkerchief in his fingers.

Each adjusts himself and says "yes," or "all right."

"Now mind, gentlemen, when I drop it."

There ensued one dreadful second of suspense, and — blowing his nose violently in the fatal handkerchief — to the surprise of each, the tall thin second steps hurriedly between them, and with the incoherence of a madman, as he stuffs the handkerchief into his pocket, cries across to his brother "second," in a loud voice —

"Now stick your cane in the ground, and mind, the best shooting in six shots wins the hundred, and you begin, Sir John.

And then, waving his hand forward a little, he called, "Please steady for a moment; only twelve shots, and you can pass; but there's a wager here. Will you kindly wait for a very few minutes?"

Now this last speech was addressed to a tall "scraggy" man, with a very long neck, and a black frock-coat on, that somehow looked at once new and seedy — dyed, perhaps, and smoothed by some process into an unnatural gloss. This man drew a paper from his pocket as he rounded the little screen of bushes, and was closely followed by two equally oddly got-up gentlemen.

The "friend" with the red nose, who had seen such apparitions before, had no difficulty in recognising a "detective," and "policemen in plain clothes"; and, with excellent presence of mind, he had lied cheerfully, as we have heard.

The tall stranger with the long neck beckoned to him, saying, "I beg your pardon, sir," as he fumbled with his paper, and still advanced.

"Well?" said the second, making up his mind and stepping forward to meet him.

The stranger may have had his suspicions, but he was upon quite other game.

"Did you happen to see Mr. Burton, that's stopping down here at the George, sir, going this way?" he asked.

"No."

The detective had a word to say to him aside; and when it was said, the "friend" beckoned to his brother "second," who heard likewise, and called, "Sir John, do come here for a moment"; and to the policeman he added, "Sir John Mardykes is a magistrate of our county."

Sir John arrived, and also heard the murmured words of the detective; and Charles Shirley drew near, and heard likewise.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Charles, very pale; "he is gone up the hill with Miss Mildmay."

"This thing's at an end, of course," said the "friend" with the nose, drawing his associate apart by the arm.

"Of course," whispered the fat friend in the white hat energetically, "resting upon such a basis!"

They both agreed, as they brought their principals quietly together. Those "principals," at the instance of their friends shook hands, but, I am bound to say, rather coldly, and instantly the united party moved up the hill, following the line of the road, for Charles, who had seen them set out in the boat, rightly conjectured whereabouts they must be.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### GIDDY.

OLD Mr. Burton, with his companion, had got on, languid and smiling, but very agreeably, notwithstanding his occasional pauses for rest; and I shall now describe the point at which he said with a smile, and a sigh, and a little shrug —

“Ha, ha-at last — here we are!”

He looked pallid, tired, and in a dark reverie, from which, suddenly awakening, he said —

“You can see the flowers, *there*.”

With his stick he pointed; and she answered, delighted —

“Oh, dear! how beautiful — how wonderful! but how shall we get them?”

The old road, half-hidden, with its close nap of grass, and skirted with the spreading mantle of heath and ferns that cover the steep that ascend at their right, is traced at the downward side by a halfobliterated fence of peat and here and there of stones, which had in this spot been displaced. With a steep convexity, the hill bends downward here. The near horizon, as you look from the road, terminates in a sudden curve not ten steps down the descent.

“I am so unaccountably and absurdly knocked up, to-day,” said he, “that I can do nothing. Do you see just there, not nine feet down the slope, that little ridge? I rested my feet upon that, and plucked the flower, and came up again; but to-day I am quite good-for-nothing, as you see — utterly done up — hardly able to walk; but if you are not afraid to do what an old fellow did only two days ago, you can hold the end of my stick, and with your feet resting on that little ledge and so pluck the flowers, as many as you like. It is perfectly easy, or I should not allow you to try.”

Laura Mildmay could walk those mountains, to which from her childhood she had been accustomed, like a chamois; but this was an unpleasant venture. Over the brow of the steep you could see, five hundred feet below, the distant town of Golden Friars like a tiny toy village beneath them, and a strip of the blue lake.

“Are you quite sure, Mr. Burton, that the little ridge there, as you call it, is perfectly firm?”

“As the mountain itself, my dear child. I stood upon it for five minutes on Saturday, of course leaning on the bank at the same time; and I weigh fourteen stone, and you hardly seven.”

“Oh, then, there *can* be no danger,” she said. “It would be so cowardly to return without the flowers; and if you kindly hold your stick to me, it will make me feel quite comfortable.”

In a moment it was arranged, and, kneeling on the slope, and holding fast to the end of the stick, she allowed herself to slide down till her feet rested on the prominence on which she relied for support.

It turned out to be merely a mass of peat, detached from its position at the edge of the road; and it instantly slipped under the pressure of her feet, and slid down the smooth turf, faster and faster, till it disappeared over the deepening edge.

“Hullo! what’s that! Good heaven!” cried Mr. Burton from above, as in her momentary panic she suddenly endeavoured to recover the summit by the aid of his stick, which escaped from his hold, and she found herself lying, without support, upon the smooth declivity, which was clothed with a short grass baked by the sun as brown and shiny as the hair on the back of a trunk.

“Don’t be frightened — be steady, it will be all right,” cried Mr. Burton. But the young lady was already slipping slowly down the glassy surface.

Her tremendous situation was now too plain, and a piercing scream burst from her lips and soared away through the wide vacuity.

She had turned on her side, her shoulder touching the smooth turf, trying vainly to bury her fingers in the hard surface. Thus, inch by inch, slowly she glided by the end of a huge mass of rock which hung close by her, flanking her descent, and then, within a foot, she caught a glimpse of that towards which, a little lower down, she was drifting. She was, as it were, slipping down the steep roof of a dome, and near enough to its side-edge to measure the fall to which she was hastening. There suddenly opened the sunny landscape beneath, the immense distance and the smooth stone precipice, that, with a slight convexity, curved darkly down five hundred feet to the verge of the lake, like a wall. She shut her eyes and screamed again.

A man passing by, summoned by that cry, ran to the spot, and, with a word or two of horror in his queer dialect, ran to his dwelling to fetch a rope.

At every yard the bank was steeper. Little hope there was. She felt herself still slipping. Her hand lighted on a solitary tuft of fern, and she caught it. She opened her eyes.

A crow came sailing slowly over, only a few feet above the level of the turf, and dived towards her as it passed, curiously, and so swooped over the airy ledge.

She heard the singing of some ladies in a boat, far below, upon the lake, rising sweet and faint, but distinct.

Every leaf and blade of vegetation on the slanting brink close under her eye, grew horribly sharp and exaggerated.

With white lips and eyes dimming with terror, she held by the frail stay her hand but encountered. It broke, and with it in her fingers she again slipped downward, a little more, and a little more, and now a good deal, and she felt that her feet had actually cleared the edge.

And now a frenzy seized Mr. Burton, who, in distraction, threw himself on his knees, crying aloud; and as he stood up and stamped about in his agony, a great stone, dislodged by him, bounded down so close that the earth shook under her, as it flew over the edge of the cliff.

Again her fingers encountered a resisting object, a little angle of rock peeped scarce an inch above the turf.

Once more Mr. Burton’s stampings and running hither and thither brought down a piece of rock which again bounded close by her.



She shut her eyes, and wildly she saw earned the awful name of her Creator; her fingers scarcely felt the hold on which her next moment's life depended.

But, heaven and earth! what is this?

Voices are heard above — many; one that she knew. It was Charles Shirley's, approaching lower and lower, nearer and nearer, cheering, exhorting her; and now a strong arm is round her — firmly, convulsively.

A rope with a running knot, sustained by many hands from above, secures him.

At first, little by little, but now with better progress, they are making upward way — and still — and still — and the same powerful arm clasps her like a girdle of iron.

And now — thank Heaven! at last — at top, safe on level ground; and Laura Mildmay knows no more for many minutes. She has fainted.

What has become of Mr. Burton, alias Blinks, alias Amyot, alias and truly Captain Torquil — alive, and still possessed with his sordid and murderous purpose? While every hand was employed in the rescue of Laura Mildmay, this man, accused of many forgeries and frauds, and crowning his guilt with this ferocious perfidy, has escaped.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CONCLUSION.

THE whole town is alarmed. You may be sure the vicar's house is in a pretty flutter at the news. Miss Laura, always something of an idol, is now, and for days after, worshipped with a frantic adoration.

Dr. Lincote and Mr. Tarlcot are at the "George and Dragon," with Mr. Turnbull; and these three wise men of Golden Friars are putting their heads together over this ghastly breakdown of their pattern philanthropist.

"I never was so deceived in man!" said the doctor. "Pon my soul, it's a nice knock to our dispensary! And Sir John says he found him with his teeth in one tumbler, and his eye in another, and a hole in its place you could put a turnip in, and his face like a nutcracker, and blazing like a furnace, and the old villain himself as drunk as a fiddler! He must be a heartless scoundrel, or he could not have played such a trick on the poor."

"I never had occasion to advise anyone about him. It was only through the vicar and you, that I knew anything of him," said Mr. Tarlcot. "He did not take me in, I promise you. I hope he has not hit you very hard, Mr. Turnbull — a stiff bill, I'm afraid?"

Mr. Turnbull scratched his head, and looked pompous, and perhaps a little sheepish.

"Might a' bin worse, sir. There's a big boxful o' things upstairs; but I mun lose five pounds or more. Who'd a' took him for such a ramsallion?"

"Did he get drunk here?" asked the doctor. "I think you should have put us a bit on our guard."

"I never sid him nappy," said Mr. Turnbull. "But he got through a deal o' brandy, considering what an old man he was. I could a' wished it *less*, sir," said the innkeeper, and considering that it was not paid for, I can well believe him.

"But didn't he correspond with half the swells in England?" inquired the attorney.

"Well, I was thinking o' that. I'm not sa sure. He sent letters to the highest in the land, no doubt; no end o' them. But I can't mind that he got many letters in answer. I don't think he did. Why, I could write to the Archbishop o' Canterbury every week — what for no? — and to the Dook o' Wellington, or the Lord Mayor o' Lunnon, though I never sid one o' the lot, and that, I do consayt, was that old boy's case."

"Not a bad notion," said the attorney, with an attorney's amused appreciation.

In the meantime, a full score of tall fellows from the town and about it, with hasty fury threw down sledge, or spade, or cricket-bat, and set off to scour the fells in search of the old miscreant.

Evening came. The elder townsmen were gathered on the margin of the water, and many glasses were directed to the opposite side of the lake, the bleak mountain sides, the jagged ravines, and angular summits. But a fog spread gradually down the sides of the mountains, and by-and-by shrouded the scene of the pursuit in white folds of vapour from their view.

It was late that night in the thick fog, which, creeping across the lake, had by this time enveloped the town, when, in broken detachments, by twos and threes, the police, with the other pursuers, dropped in, unsuccessful, and quite "done up."

It was prodigious that the old villain should have foiled the police and a body of the most experienced mountaineers in Golden Friars!

The mysterious veil of fog was still hanging over the landscape next morning, when people peeped out of their bedroom windows in Golden Friars, in vain search for the outline of the fells. Hidden behind that curtain was the scene of Mr. Burton's bivouac. One comfort was, that the most which impeded search, also very nearly precluded escape.

The fells aie so precipitous at the further side that, the fog taken into account, it was next to impossible he could, walled in by those awful stone frontages, have found a passage among them to the level beneath.

The pursuers this morning divided their force into two parties; one beginning their march across the fells from the upper end of the lake, the other from the end nearest Golden Friars; and so soon as the mist began to clear, they commenced their movement from opposite ends of the range, in a long chain of scouts, each maintaining its respective communications by shouting and signalling from point to point.

They had taken their rations with them, and returned again to Golden Friars at nightfall, after a fatiguing and fruitless search.

If they had known the truth it would have saved them many renewed searches and many scourings of those steep and dangerous mountains.

Another week revealed it, and the swollen body of the old villain, drowned in the lake on the night of his attempt on the life of Miss Mildmay, in the endeavour, under cover of the mountain fog, to accomplish his escape, came to the surface, and was floated by the breeze to the shore, not far from Golden Friars.

Need I say what further happened; or how happy Laura and Charles Shirley are in the union that followed?

THE END

# THE HAUNTED BARONET

## CHAPTER I

### *The George and Dragon*

The pretty little town of Golden Friars — standing by the margin of the lake, hemmed round by an amphitheatre of purple mountain, rich in tint and furrowed by ravines, high in air, when the tall gables and narrow windows of its ancient graystone houses, and the tower of the old church, from which every evening the curfew still rings, show like silver in the moonbeams, and the black elms that stand round throw moveless shadows upon the short level grass — is one of the most singular and beautiful sights I have ever seen.

There it rises, 'as from the stroke of the enchanter's wand,' looking so light and filmy, that you could scarcely believe it more than a picture reflected on the thin mist of night.

On such a still summer night the moon shone splendidly upon the front of the George and Dragon, the comfortable graystone inn of Golden Friars, with the grandest specimen of the old inn-sign, perhaps, left in England. It looks right across the lake; the road that skirts its margin running by the steps of the hall-door, opposite to which, at the other side of the road, between two great posts, and framed in a fanciful wrought-iron border splendid with gilding, swings the famous sign of St. George and the Dragon, gorgeous with colour and gold.

In the great room of the George and Dragon, three or four of the old *habitués* of that cozy lounge were refreshing a little after the fatigues of the day.

This is a comfortable chamber, with an oak wainscot; and whenever in summer months the air is sharp enough, as on the present occasion, a fire helped to light it up; which fire, being chiefly wood, made a pleasant broad flicker on panel and ceiling, and yet did not make the room too hot.

On one side sat Doctor Torvey, the doctor of Golden Friars, who knew the weak point of every man in the town, and what medicine agreed with each inhabitant — a fat gentleman, with a jolly laugh and an appetite for all sorts of news, big and little, and who liked a pipe, and made a tumbler of punch at about this hour, with a bit of lemon-peel in it. Beside him sat William Peers, a thin old gentleman, who had lived for more than thirty years in India, and was quiet and benevolent, and the last man in Golden Friars who wore a pigtail. Old Jack Amerald, an ex-captain of the navy, with his short stout leg on a chair, and its wooden companion beside it, sipped his grog, and bawled in the oldfashioned navy way, and called his friends his 'hearties.' In the middle, opposite the hearth, sat deaf Tom Hollar, always placid, and smoked his pipe, looking serenely at the fire. And the landlord of the George and Dragon every now and then strutted in, and sat down in the high-backed wooden armchair, according to the oldfashioned republican ways of the place, and took his share in the talk gravely, and was heartily welcome.

"And so Sir Bale is coming home at last," said the Doctor. "Tell us any more you heard since."

"Nothing," answered Richard Turnbull, the host of the George. "Nothing to speak of; only 'tis certain sure, and so best; the old house won't look so dowly now."

"Twyne says the estate owes a good capful o' money by this time, hey?" said the Doctor, lowering his voice and winking.

"Weel, they do say he's been nout at dow. I don't mind saying so to *you*, mind, sir, where all's friends together; but he'll get that right in time."

"More like to save here than where he is," said the Doctor with another grave nod.

"He does very wisely," said Mr. Peers, having blown out a thin stream of smoke, "and creditably, to pull-up in time. He's coming here to save a little, and perhaps he'll marry; and it is the more creditable, if, as they say, he dislikes the place, and would prefer staying where he is."

And having spoken thus gently, Mr. Peers resumed his pipe cheerfully.

"No, he don't like the place; that is, I'm told he *didn't*," said the innkeeper.

"He *hates* it," said the Doctor with another dark nod.

"And no wonder, if all's true I've heard," cried old Jack Amerald. "Didn't he drown a woman and her child in the lake?"

"Hollo! my dear boy, don't let them hear you say that; you're all in the clouds."

"By Jen!" exclaimed the landlord after an alarmed silence, with his mouth and eyes open, and his pipe in his hand, "why, sir, I pay rent for the house up there. I'm thankful — dear knows, I *am* thankful — we're all to ourselves!"

Jack Amerald put his foot on the floor, leaving his wooden leg in its horizontal position, and looked round a little curiously.

"Well, if it wasn't him, it was some one else. I'm sure it happened up at Mardykes. I took the bearings on the water myself from Glads Scaur to Mardykes Jetty, and from the George and Dragon sign down here — down to the white house under Forrick Fells. I could fix a buoy over the very spot. Some one here told me the bearings, I'd take my oath, where the body was seen; and yet no boat could ever come up with it; and that was queer, you know, so I clapt it down in my log."

"Ay, sir, there *was* some flummery like that, Captain," said Turnbull; "for folk will be gabbin'. But 'twas his grandsire was talked o', not him; and 'twould play the hangment wi' me down here, if 'twas thought there was stories like that passin' in the George and Dragon."

"Well, his grandfather; 'twas all one to him, I take it."

"There never was no proof, Captain, no more than smoke; and the family up at Mardykes wouldn't allow the king to talk o' them like that, sir; for though they be lang deod that had most right to be angered in the matter, there's none o' the name but would be half daft to think 'twas still believed, and he full out as mich as any. Not that I need care more than another, though they do say he's a bit frowsy and short-waisted; for he can't shouter me out o' the George while I pay my rent, till nine hundred and ninety-nine year be rin oot; and a man, be he ne'er sa het, has time to cool before then. But there's no good quarrellin' wi' teathy folk; and it may lie in his way to do the George mony an ill turn, and mony a gude one; an' it's only fair to say it happened a long way before he was born, and there's no good in vexin' him; and I lay ye a pound, Captain, the Doctor hods wi' me."

The Doctor, whose business was also sensitive, nodded; and then he said, "But for all that, the story's old, Dick Turnbull — older than you or I, my jolly good friend."

"And best forgotten," interposed the host of the George.

"Ay, best forgotten; but that it's not like to be," said the Doctor, plucking up courage. "Here's our friend the Captain has heard it; and the mistake he has made shows there's one thing worse than its being quite remembered, and that is, its being *half* remembered. We can't stop people talking; and a story like that will see us all off the hooks, and be in folks' mouths, still, as strong as ever."

"Ay; and now I think on it, 'twas Dick Harman that has the boat down there — an old tar like myself — that told me that yarn. I was trying for pike, and he pulled me over the place, and that's how I came to hear it. I say, Tom, my hearty, serve us out another glass of brandy, will you?" shouted the Captain's voice as the waiter crossed the room; and that florid and grizzled naval hero clapped his leg again on the chair by its wooden companion, which he was wont to call his jury-mast.

"Well, I do believe it will be spoke of longer than we are like to hear," said the host, "and I don't much matter the story, if it baint told o' the wrong man." Here he touched his tumbler with the spoon, indicating by that little ring that Tom, who had returned with the Captain's grog, was to replenish it with punch. "And Sir Bale is like to be a friend to this house. I don't see no reason why he shouldn't. The George and Dragon has bin in our family ever since the reign of King Charles the Second. It was William Turnbull in that time, which they called it the Restoration, he taking the lease from Sir Tony Mardykes that was then. They was but knights then. They was made baronets first in the reign of King George the Second; you may see it in the list of baronets and the nobility. The lease was made to William Turnbull, which came from London; and he built the stables, which they was out o' repair, as you may read to this day in the lease; and the house has never had but one sign since — the George and Dragon, it is pretty well known in England — and one name to its master. It has been owned by a Turnbull from that day to this, and they have not been counted bad men." A murmur of applause testified the assent of his guests. "They has been steady churchgoin' folk, and brewed good drink, and maintained the best o' characters, hereaways and farther off too, though 'tis I, Richard Turnbull, that says it; and while they pay their rent, no man has power to put them out; for their title's as good to the George and Dragon, and the two fields, and the croft, and the grazing o' their kye on the green, as Sir Bale Mardykes to the Hall up there and estate. So 'tis nout to me, except in the way o' friendliness, what the family may think o' me; only the George and they has always been kind and friendly, and I don't want to break the old custom."

"Well said, Dick!" exclaimed Doctor Torvey; "I own to your conclusion; but there ain't a soul here but ourselves — and we're all friends, and you are your own master — and, hang it, you'll tell us that story about the drowned woman, as you heard it from your father long ago."

"Ay, do, and keep us to our liquor, my hearty!" cried the Captain.

Mr. Peers looked his entreaty; and deaf Mr. Hollar, having no interest in the petition, was at least a safe witness, and, with his pipe in his lips, a cozy piece of furniture.

Richard Turnbull had his punch beside him; he looked over his shoulder. The door was closed, the fire was cheery, and the punch was fragrant, and all friendly faces about him. So said he:

"Gentlemen, as you're pleased to wish it, I don't see no great harm in it; and at any rate, 'twill prevent mistakes. It is more than ninety years since. My father was but a boy then; and many a time I have heard him tell it in this very room."

And looking into his glass he mused, and stirred his punch slowly.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Drowned Woman*

"It ain't much of a homminy," said the host of the George. "I'll not keep you long over it, gentlemen. There was a handsome young lady, Miss Mary Feltram o' Cloostedd by name. She was the last o' that family; and had gone very poor. There's but the walls o' the house left now; grass growing in the hall, and ivy over the gables; there's no one livin' has ever hard tell o' smoke out o' they chimblies. It stands on t'other side o' the lake, on the level wi' a deal o' a'ad trees behint and aside it at the gap o' the clough, under the pike o' Maiden Fells. Ye may see it wi' a spyin'-glass from the boatfield at Mardykes Hall."

"I've been there fifty times," said the Doctor.

"Well there was dealin's betwixt the two families; and there's good and bad in every family; but the Mardykes, in them days, was a wild lot. And when old Feltram o' Cloostedd died, and the young lady his daughter was left a ward o' Sir Jasper Mardykes — an ill day for her, poor lass! — twenty year older than her he was, an' more; and nothin' about him, they say, to make anyone like or love him, ill-faur'd and little and dow."

"Dow — that's gloomy," Doctor Torvey instructed the Captain aside.

"But they do say, they has an old blud-steane ring in the family that has a charm in't; and happen how it might, the poor lass fell in love wi' him. Some said they was married. Some said it hang'd i' the bell-ropes, and never had the priest's blessing; but anyhow, married or no, there was talk enough amang the folk, and out o' doors she would na budge. And there was two wee barns; and she prayed him hard to confess the marriage, poor thing! But t'was a bootlese bene, and he would not allow they should bear his name, but their mother's; he was a hard man, and hed the bit in his teeth, and went his ain gait. And having tired of her, he took in his head to marry a lady of the Barnets, and it behoved him to be shut o' her and her children; and so she nor them was seen no more at Mardykes Hall. And the eldest, a boy, was left in care of my grandfather's father here in the George."

"That queer Philip Feltram that's travelling with Sir Bale so long is a descendant of his?" said the Doctor.

"Grandson," observed Mr. Peers, removing his pipe for a moment; "and is the last of that stock."

"Well, no one could tell where she had gone to. Some said to distant parts, some said to the madhouse, some one thing, some another; but neither she nor the barn was ever seen or spoke to by the folk at Mardykes in life again. There was one Mr. Wigram that lived in them times down at Moultry, and had sarved, like the Captain here, in the king's navy in his day; and early of a morning down he comes to the town for a boat, sayin' he was looking towards Snakes Island through his spyin'-glass, and he seen a woman about a hundred and fifty yards outside of it; the Captain here has heard the bearings right enough. From her hips upwards she was stark and straight out o' the water, and a baby in her arms. Well, no one else could see it, nor he neither, when they went down to the boat. But next morning he saw the same thing, and the boatman saw it too; and they rowed for it, both pulling might and main; but after a mile or so they could see it no more, and gave over. The next that saw it was the vicar, I forget his name now — but he was up the lake to a funeral at Mortlock Church; and coming back with a bit of a sail up, just passin' Snakes Island, what should they hear on a sudden but a wowl like a death-cry, shrill and bleak, as made the very blood hoot in their veins; and looking along the water not a hundred yards away, saw the same grizzled sight in the moonlight; so they turned the tiller, and came near enough to see her face — blea it was, and drenched wi' water — and she was above the lake to her middle, stiff as a post, holdin' the weeny barn out to them, and flyrin' [smiling scornfully] on them as they drew nigh her. They were half-frighted, not knowing what to make of it; but passing as close as the boatman could bring her side, the vicar stretched over the gunwale to catch her, and she bent forward, pushing the dead bab forward; and as she did, on a sudden she gave a yellock that scared them, and they saw her no more. 'Twas no livin' woman, for she couldn't rise that height above the water, as they well knew when they came to think; and knew it was a dobbie they saw; and ye may be sure they didn't spare prayer and blessin', and went on their course straight before the wind; for neither would a-took the worth o' all the Mardykes to look sich a fretin' i' the face again. 'Twas seen another time by market-folk crossin' fra Gyllenstan in the selfsame place; and Snakes Island got a bad neam, and none cared to go nar it after nightfall."

"Do you know anything of that Feltram that has been with him abroad?" asked the Doctor.

"They say he's no good at anything — a harmless mafflin; he was a long gaumless gawky when he went awa," said Richard Turnbull. "The Feltrams and the Mardykes was sib, ye know; and that made what passed in the misfortune o' that young lady spoken of all the harder; and this young man ye speak of is a grandson o' the lad that was put here in care o' my grandfather."

"Great-grandson. His father was grandson," said Mr. Peers; "he held a commission in the army and died in the West Indies. This Philip Feltram is the last o' that line — illegitimate, you know, it is held — and the little that remained of the Feltram property went nearly fourscore years ago to the Mardykes, and this Philip is maintained by Sir Bale; it is pleasant, notwithstanding all the stories one hears, gentlemen, that the only thing we know of him for certain should be so creditable to his kindness."

"To be sure," acquiesced Mr. Turnbull.

While they talked the horn sounded, and the mail-coach drew up at the door of the George and Dragon to set down a passenger and his luggage.

Dick Turnbull rose and went out to the hall with careful bustle, and Doctor Torvey followed as far as the door, which commanded a view of it, and saw several trunks cased in canvas pitched into the hall, and by careful Tom and a boy lifted one on top of the other, behind the corner of the banister. It would have been below the dignity of his cloth to go out and read the labels on these, or the Doctor would have done otherwise, so great was his curiosity.

## CHAPTER III

### *Philip Feltram*

The new guest was now in the hall of the George, and Doctor Torvey could hear him talking with Mr. Turnbull. Being himself one of the dignitaries of Golden Friars, the Doctor, having regard to first impressions, did not care to be seen in his post of observation; and closing the door gently, returned to his chair by the fire, and in an undertone informed his cronies that there was a new arrival in the George, and he could not hear, but would not wonder if he were taking a private room; and he seemed to have trunks enough to build a church with.

"Don't be too sure we haven't Sir Bale on board," said Amerald, who would have followed his crony the Doctor to the door — for never was retired naval hero of a village more curious than he — were it not that his wooden leg made a distinct pounding on the floor that was inimical, as experience had taught him, to mystery.

"That can't be," answered the Doctor; "Charley Twyne knows everything about it, and has a letter every second day; and there's no chance of Sir Bale before the tenth; this is a tourist, you'll find. I don't know what the d — I keeps Turnbull; he knows well enough we are all naturally willing to hear who it is."

"Well, he won't trouble us here, I bet ye;" and catching deaf Mr. Hollar's eye, the Captain nodded, and pointed to the little table beside him, and made a gesture imitative of the rattling of a dice-box; at which that quiet old gentleman also nodded sunnily; and up got the Captain and conveyed the backgammon-box to the table, near Hollar's elbow, and the two worthies were soon sinciputing and catre-acing, with the pleasant clatter that accompanies that ancient game. Hollar had thrown sizes and made his double point, and the honest Captain, who could stand many things better than Hollar's throwing such throws so early in the evening, cursed his opponent's luck and sneered at his play, and called the company to witness, with a distinctness which a stranger to smiling Hollar's deafness would have thought hardly civil; and just at this moment the door opened, and Richard Turnbull showed his new guest into the room, and ushered him to a vacant seat near the other corner of the table before the fire.

The stranger advanced slowly and shyly, with something a little deprecatory in his air, to which a lathy figure, a slight stoop, and a very gentle and even heartbroken look in his pale long face, gave a more marked character of shrinking and timidity.

He thanked the landlord aside, as it were, and took his seat with a furtive glance round, as if he had no right to come in and intrude upon the happiness of these honest gentlemen.

He saw the Captain scanning him from under his shaggy grey eyebrows while he was pretending to look only at his game; and the Doctor was able to recount to Mrs. Torvey when he went home every article of the stranger's dress.

It was odd and melancholy as his peaked face.

He had come into the room with a short black cloak on, and a rather tall foreign felt hat, and a pair of shiny leather gaiters or leggings on his thin legs; and altogether presented a general resemblance to the conventional figure of Guy Fawkes.

Not one of the company assembled knew the appearance of the Baronet. The Doctor and old Mr. Peers remembered something of his looks; and certainly they had no likeness, but the reverse, to those presented by the newcomer. The Baronet, as now described by people who had chanced to see him, was a dark man, not above the middle size, and with a certain decision in his air and talk; whereas this person was tall, pale, and in air and manner feeble. So this broken trader in the world's commerce, with whom all seemed to have gone wrong, could not possibly be he.

Presently, in one of his stealthy glances, the Doctor's eye encountered that of the stranger, who was by this time drinking his tea — a thin and feminine liquor little used in that room.

The stranger did not seem put out; and the Doctor, interpreting his look as a permission to converse, cleared his voice, and said urbanely,

"We have had a little frost by night, down here, sir, and a little fire is no great harm — it is rather pleasant, don't you think?"

The stranger bowed acquiescence with a transient wintry smile, and looked gratefully on the fire.

"This place is a good deal admired, sir, and people come a good way to see it; you have been here perhaps before?"

"Many years ago."

Here was another pause.

"Places change imperceptibly — in detail, at least — a good deal," said the Doctor, making an effort to keep up a conversation that plainly would not go on of itself; "and people too; population shifts — there's an old fellow, sir, they call *Death*."

"And an old fellow they call the *Doctor*, that helps him," threw in the Captain humorously, allowing his attention to get entangled in the conversation, and treating them to one of his tempestuous ha-ha-ha's.

"We are expecting the return of a gentleman who would be a very leading member of our little society down here," said the Doctor, not noticing the Captain's joke. "I mean Sir Bale Mardykes. Mardykes Hall is a pretty object from the water, sir, and a very fine old place."

The melancholy stranger bowed slightly, but rather in courtesy to the relator, it seemed, than that the Doctor's lore interested him much.

"And on the opposite side of the lake," continued Doctor Torvey, "there is a building that contrasts very well with it — the old house of the Feltrams — quite a ruin now, at the mouth of the glen — Cloostedd House, a very picturesque object."

"Exactly opposite," said the stranger dreamily, but whether in the tone of acquiescence or interrogatory, the Doctor could not be quite sure.

"That was one of our great families down here that has disappeared. It has dwindled down to nothing."

"Duce ace," remarked Mr. Hollar, who was attending to his game.

"While others have mounted more suddenly and amazingly still," observed gentle Mr. Peers, who was great upon county genealogies.

"Sizes!" thundered the Captain, thumping the table with an oath of disgust.

"And Snakes Island is a very pretty object; they say there used to be snakes there," said the Doctor, enlightening the visitor.

"Ah! that's a mistake," said the dejected guest, making his first original observation. "It should be spelt *Snaiks*. In the old papers it is called Sen-aiks Island from the seven oaks that grew in a clump there."

"Hey? that's very curious, egad! I daresay," said the Doctor, set right thus by the stranger, and eyeing him curiously.

"Very true, sir," observed Mr. Peers; "three of those oaks, though, two of them little better than stumps, are there still; and Clewson of Heckleston has an old document — —"

Here, unhappily, the landlord entered the room in a fuss, and walking up to the stranger, said, "The chaise is at the door, Mr. Feltram, and the trunks up, sir."

Mr. Feltram rose quietly and took out his purse, and said,

"I suppose I had better pay at the bar?"

"As you like best, sir," said Richard Turnbull.

Mr. Feltram bowed all round to the gentlemen, who smiled, ducked or waved their hands; and the Doctor fussily followed him to the hall-door, and welcomed him back to Golden Friars — there was real kindness in this welcome — and proffered his broad brown hand, which Mr. Feltram took; and then he plunged into his chaise, and the door being shut, away he glided, chaise, horses, and driver, like shadows, by the margin of the moonlighted lake, towards Mardykes Hall.

And after a few minutes' stand upon the steps, looking along the shadowy track of the chaise, they returned to the glow of the room, in which a pleasant perfume of punch still prevailed; and beside Mr. Philip Feltram's deserted teathings, the host of the George enlightened his guests by communicating freely the little he had picked up. The principal fact he had to tell was, that Sir Bale adhered strictly to his original plan, and was to arrive on the tenth. A few days would bring them to that, and the nine-days wonder run its course and lose its interest. But in the meantime, all Golden Friars was anxious to see what Sir Bale Mardykes was like.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Baronet Appears*

As the candles burn blue and the air smells of brimstone at the approach of the Evil One, so, in the quiet and healthy air of Golden Friars, a depressing and agitating influence announced the coming of the long-absent Baronet.

From abroad, no good whatever had been at any time heard of him, and a great deal that was, in the ears of simple folk living in that unsophisticated part of the world, vaguely awful.

Stories that travel so far, however, lose something of their authority, as well as definiteness, on the way; there was always room for charity to suggest a mistake or exaggeration; and if good men turned up their hands and eyes after a new story, and ladies of experience, who knew mankind, held their heads high and looked grim and mysterious at mention of his name, nevertheless an interval of silence softened matters a little, and the sulphureous perfume dissipated itself in time.

Now that Sir Bale Mardykes had arrived at the Hall, there were hurried consultations held in many households. And though he was tried and sentenced by drumhead over some austere hearths, as a rule the law of gravitation prevailed, and the greater house drew the lesser about it, and county people within the visiting radius paid their respects at the Hall.

The Reverend Martin Bedel, the then vicar of Golden Friars, a stout short man, with a mulberry-coloured face and small gray eyes, and taciturn habits, called and entered the drawingroom at Mardykes Hall, with his fat and garrulous wife on his arm.

The drawingroom has a great projecting Tudor window looking out on the lake, with its magnificent background of furrowed and purple mountains.

Sir Bale was not there, and Mrs. Bedel examined the pictures, and ornaments, and the books, making such remarks as she saw fit; and then she looked out of the window, and admired the prospect. She wished to stand well with the Baronet, and was in a mood to praise everything.

You may suppose she was curious to see him, having heard for years such strange tales of his doings.

She expected the hero of a brilliant and wicked romance; and listened for the step of the truant Lovelace who was to fulfil her idea of manly beauty and fascination.

She sustained a slight shock when he did appear.

Sir Bale Mardykes was, as she might easily have remembered, a middle-aged man — and he looked it. He was not even an imposing-looking man for his time of life: he was of about the middle height, slightly made, and dark featured. She had expected something of the gaiety and animation of Versailles, and an evident cultivation of the art of pleasing. What she did see was a remarkable gravity, not to say gloom, of countenance — the only feature of which that struck her being a pair of large dark-gray eyes, that were cold and earnest. His manners had the ease of perfect confidence; and his talk and air were those of a person who might have known how to please, if it were worth the trouble, but who did not care twopence whether he pleased or not.

He made them each a bow, courtly enough, but there was no smile — not even an affectation of cordiality. Sir Bale, however, was chatty, and did not seem to care much what he said, or what people thought of him; and there was a suspicion of sarcasm in what he said that the rustic literality of good Mrs. Bedel did not always detect.

"I believe I have not a clergyman but *you*, sir, within any reasonable distance?"

"Golden Friars *is* the nearest," said Mrs. Bedel, answering, as was her pleasure on all practicable occasions, for her husband. "And southwards, the nearest is Wyllarden — and by a bird's flight that is thirteen miles and a half, and by the road more than nineteen — twenty, I may say, by the road. Ha, ha, ha! it is a long way to look for a clergyman."

"Twenty miles of road to carry you thirteen miles across, hey? The road-makers lead you a pretty dance here; those gentlemen know how to make money, and like to show people the scenery from a variety of points. No one likes a straight road but the man who pays for it, or who, when he travels, is brute enough to wish to get to his journey's end."

"That is so true, Sir Bale; one never cares if one is not in a hurry. That's what Martin thinks — don't we, Martin? — And then, you know, coming home is the time you *are* in a hurry — when you are thinking of your cup of tea and the children; and *then*, you know, you have the fall of the ground all in your favour."

"It's well to have anything in your favour in this place. And so there are children?"

"A good many," said Mrs. Bedel, with a proud and mysterious smile, and a nod; "you wouldn't guess how many."

"Not I; I only wonder you did not bring them all."

"That's very goodnatured of you, Sir Bale, but all could not come at *one* bout; there are — tell him, Martin — ha, ha, ha! there are eleven."

"It must be very cheerful down at the vicarage," said Sir Bale graciously; and turning to the vicar he added, "But how unequally blessings are divided! You have eleven, and I not one — that I'm aware of."

"And then, in that direction straight before you, you have the lake, and then the fells; and five miles from the foot of the mountain at the other side, before you reach Fottrell — and that is twenty-five miles by the road — —"

"Dear me! how far apart they are set! My gardener told me this morning that asparagus grows very thinly in this part of the world. How thinly clergymen grow also down here — in one sense," he added politely, for the vicar was stout.

"We were looking out of the window — we amused ourselves that way before you came — and your view is certainly the very best anywhere round this side; your view of the lake and the fells — what mountains they are, Sir Bale!"

"Pon my soul, they are! I wish I could blow them asunder with a charge of duck-shot, and I shouldn't be stifled by them long. But I suppose, as we can't get rid of them, the next best thing is to admire them. We are pretty well married to them, and there is no use in quarrelling."

"I know you don't think so, Sir Bale, ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't take a good deal and spoil Mardykes Hall."



“You can’t get a mouthful or air, or see the sun of a morning, for those frightful mountains,” he said with a peevish frown at them.

“Well, the lake at all events — that you *must* admire, Sir Bale?”

“No ma’am, I don’t admire the lake. I’d drain the lake if I could — I hate the lake. There’s nothing so gloomy as a lake pent up among barren mountains. I can’t conceive what possessed my people to build our house down here, at the edge of a lake; unless it was the fish, and precious fish it is — pike! I don’t know how people digest it — *I* can’t. I’d as soon think of eating a watchman’s pike.”

“I thought that having travelled so much abroad, you would have acquired a great liking for that kind of scenery, Sir Bale; there is a great deal of it on the Continent, ain’t there?” said Mrs. Bedel. “And the boating.”

“Boating, my dear Mrs. Bedel, is the dullest of all things; don’t you think so? Because a boat looks very pretty from the shore, we fancy the shore must look very pretty from a boat; and when we try it, we find we have only got down into a pit and can see nothing rightly. For my part I hate boating, and I hate the water; and I’d rather have my house, like Haworth, at the edge of a moss, with good wholesome peat to look at, and an open horizon — savage and stupid and bleak as all that is — than be suffocated among impassable mountains, or upset in a black lake and drowned like a kitten. O, there’s luncheon in the next room; won’t you take some?”

## CHAPTER V

### *Mrs. Julaper's Room*

Sir Bale Mardykes being now established in his ancestral house, people had time to form conclusions respecting him. It must be allowed he was not popular. There was, perhaps, in his conduct something of the caprice of contempt. At all events his temper and conduct were uncertain, and his moods sometimes violent and insulting.

With respect to but one person was his conduct uniform, and that was Philip Feltram. He was a sort of aide-de-camp near Sir Bale's person, and chargeable with all the commissions and offices which could not be suitably intrusted to a mere servant. But in many respects he was treated worse than any servant of the Baronet's. Sir Bale swore at him, and cursed him; laid the blame of everything that went wrong in house, stable, or field upon his shoulders; railed at him, and used him, as people said, worse than a dog.

Why did Feltram endure this contumelious life? What could he do but endure it? was the answer. What was the power that induced strong soldiers to put off their jackets and shirts, and present their hands to be tied up, and tortured for hours, it might be, under the scourge, with an air of ready volition? The moral coercion of despair; the result of an unconscious calculation of chances which satisfies them that it is ultimately better to do all that, bad as it is, than try the alternative. These unconscious calculations are going on every day with each of us, and the results embody themselves in our lives; and no one knows that there has been a process and a balance struck, and that what they see, and very likely blame, is by the fiat of an invisible but quite irresistible power.

A man of spirit would rather break stones on the highway than eat that bitter bread, was the burden of every man's song on Feltram's bondage. But he was not so sure that even the stone-breaker's employment was open to him, or that he could break stones well enough to retain it on a fair trial. And he had other ideas of providing for himself, and a different alternative in his mind.

Goodnatured Mrs. Julaper, the old housekeeper at Mardykes Hall, was kind to Feltram, as to all others who lay in her way and were in affliction.

She was one of those good women whom Nature provides to receive the burden of other people's secrets, as the reeds did long ago, only that no chance wind could steal them away, and send them singing into strange ears.

You may still see her snuggery in Mardykes Hall, though the housekeeper's room is now in a different part of the house.

Mrs. Julaper's room was in the oldest quarter of that old house. It was wainscoted, in black panels, up to the ceiling, which was stuccoed over in the fanciful diagrams of James the First's time. Several dingy portraits, banished from time to time from other statelier rooms, found a temporary abode in this quiet spot, where they had come finally to settle and drop out of remembrance. There is a lady in white satin and a ruff; a gentleman whose legs have faded out of view, with a peaked beard, and a hawk on his wrist. There is another in a black periwig lost in the dark background, and with a steel cuirass, the gleam of which out of the darkness strikes the eye, and a scarf is dimly discoverable across it. This is that foolish Sir Guy Mardykes, who crossed the Border and joined Dundee, and was shot through the temple at Killiecrankie and whom more prudent and whiggish scions of the Mardykes family removed forthwith from his place in the Hall, and found a retirement here, from which he has not since emerged.

At the far end of this snug room is a second door, on opening which you find yourself looking down upon the great kitchen, with a little balcony before you, from which the housekeeper used to issue her commands to the cook, and exercise a sovereign supervision.

There is a shelf on which Mrs. Julaper had her Bible, her *Whole Duty of Man*, and her *Pilgrim's Progress*; and, in a file beside them, her books of housewifery, and among them volumes of MS. recipes, cookery-books, and some too on surgery and medicine, as practised by the Ladies Bountiful of the Elizabethan age, for which an antiquarian would nowadays give an eye or a hand.

Gentle half-foolish Philip Feltram would tell the story of his wrongs, and weep and wish he was dead; and kind Mrs. Julaper, who remembered him a child, would comfort him with cold pie and cherry-brand, or a cup of coffee, or some little dainty.

"O, ma'am, I'm tired of my life. What's the good of living, if a poor devil is never let alone, and called worse names than a dog? Would not it be better, Mrs. Julaper, to be dead? Wouldn't it be better, ma'am? I think so; I think it night and day. I'm always thinking the same thing. I don't care, I'll just tell him what I think, and have it off my mind. I'll tell him I can't live and bear it longer."

"There now, don't you be frettin'; but just sip this, and remember you're not to judge a friend by a wry word. He does not mean it, not he. They all had a rough side to their tongue now and again; but no one minded that. I don't, nor you needn't, no more than other folk; for the tongue, be it never so bitin', it can't draw blood, mind ye, and hard words break no bones; and I'll make a cup o' tea — ye like a cup o' tea — and we'll take a cup together, and ye'll chirp up a bit, and see how pleasant and ruddy the sun shines on the lake this evening."

She was patting him gently on the shoulder, as she stood slim and stiff in her dark silk by his chair, and her rosy little face smiled down on him. She was, for an old woman, wonderfully pretty still. What a delicate skin she must have had! The wrinkles were etched upon it with so fine a needle, you scarcely could see them a little way off; and as she smiled her cheeks looked fresh and smooth as two ruddy little apples.

"Look out, I say," and she nodded towards the window, deep set in the thick wall. "See how bright and soft everything looks in that pleasant light; *that's* better, child, than the finest picture man's hand ever painted yet, and God gives it us for nothing; and how pretty Snakes Island glows up in that light!"

The dejected man, hardly raising his head, followed with his eyes the glance of the old woman, and looked mournfully through the window.

"That island troubles me, Mrs. Julaper."

"Everything troubles you, my poor goosecap. I'll pull your lug for ye, child, if ye be so dowly;" and with a mimic pluck the goodnatured old housekeeper pinched his ear and laughed.

"I'll go to the still-room now, where the water's boiling, and I'll make a cup of tea; and if I find ye so dow when I come back, I'll throw it all out o' the window, mind."

It was indeed a beautiful picture that Feltram saw in its deep frame of old masonry. The near part of the lake was flushed all over with the low western light; the more distant waters lay dark in the shadow of the mountains; and against this shadow of purple the rocks on Snakes Island, illuminated by the setting sun, started into sharp clear yellow.

But this beautiful view had no charm — at least, none powerful enough to master the latent horror associated with its prettiest feature — for the weak and dismal man who was looking at it; and being now alone, he rose and leant on the window, and looked out, and then with a kind of shudder clutching his hands together, and walking distractedly about the room.

Without his perceiving, while his back was turned, the housekeeper came back; and seeing him walking in this distracted way, she thought to herself, as he leant again upon the window:

"Well, it is a burning shame to worrit any poor soul into that state. Sir Bale was always down on someone or something, man or beast; there always was something he hated, and could never let alone. It was not pretty; it was his nature. Happen, poor fellow, he could not help it; but so it was."

A maid came in and set the teathings down; and Mrs. Julaper drew her sad guest over by the arm, and made him sit down, and she said: "What has a man to do, frettin' in that way? By Jen, I'm ashamed o' ye, Master Philip! Ye like three lumps o' sugar, I think, and — look cheerful, ye must! — a good deal o' cream?"

"You're so kind, Mrs. Julaper, you're so cheery. I feel quite comfortable after awhile when I'm with you; I feel quite happy," and he began to cry.

She understood him very well by this time and took no notice, but went on chatting gaily, and made his tea as he liked it; and he dried his tears hastily, thinking she had not observed.

So the clouds began to clear. This innocent fellow liked nothing better than a cup of tea and a chat with gentle and cheery old Mrs. Julaper, and a talk in which the shadowy old times which he remembered as a child emerged into sunlight and lived again.

When he began to feel better, drawn into the kindly old times by the tinkle of that harmless old woman's tongue, he said:

"I sometimes think I would not so much mind — I should not care so much — if my spirits were not so depressed, and I so agitated. I suppose I am not quite well."

"Well, tell me what's wrong, child, and it's odd but I have a recipe on the shelf there that will do you good."

"It is not a matter of that sort I mean; though I'd rather have you than any doctor, if I needed medicine, to prescribe for me."

Mrs. Julaper smiled in spite of herself, well pleased; for her skill in pharmacy was a point on which the good lady prided herself, and was open to flattery, which, without intending it, the simple fellow administered.

"No, I'm well enough; I can't say I ever was better. It is only, ma'am, that I have such dreams — you have no idea."

"There are dreams and dreams, my dear: there's some signifies no more than the babble of the lake down there on the pebbles, and there's others that has a meaning; there's dreams that is but vanity, and there's dreams that is good, and dreams that is bad. Lady Mardykes — heavens be her bed this day! that's his grandmother I mean — was very sharp for reading dreams. Take another cup of tea. Dear me! what a noise the crows keep aboon our heads, going home! and how high they wing it! — that's a sure sign of fine weather. An' what do you dream about? Tell me your dream, and I may show you it's a good one, after all. For many a dream is ugly to see and ugly to tell, and a good dream, with a happy meaning, for all that."

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Intruder*

"Well, Mrs. Julaper, dreams I've dreamed like other people, old and young; but this, ma'am, has taken a fast hold of me," said Mr. Feltram dejectedly, leaning back in his chair and looking down with his hands in his pockets. "I think, Mrs. Julaper, it is getting into me. I think it's like possession."

"Possession, child! what do you mean?"

"I think there is something trying to influence me. Perhaps it is the way fellows go mad; but it won't let me alone. I've seen it three times, think of that!"

"Well, dear, and what *have* ye seen?" she asked, with an uneasy cheerfulness, smiling, with eyes fixed steadily upon him; for the idea of a madman — even gentle Philip in that state — was not quieting.

"Do you remember the picture, full-length, that had no frame — the lady in the white-satin saque — she was beautiful, *funeste*," he added, talking more to himself; and then more distinctly to Mrs. Julaper again — — "in the white-satin saque; and with the little mob cap and blue ribbons to it, and a bouquet in her fingers; that was — that — you know who she was?"

"That was your great-grandmother, my dear," said Mrs. Julaper, lowering her eyes. "It was a dreadful pity it was spoiled. The boys in the pantry had it for a year there on the table for a tray, to wash the glasses on and the like. It was a shame; that was the prettiest picture in the house, with the gentlest, rosiest face."

"It ain't so gentle or rosy now, I can tell you," said Philip. "As fixed as marble; with thin lips, and a curve at the nostril. Do you remember the woman that was found dead in the clough, when I was a boy, that the gipsies murdered, it was thought, — a cruel-looking woman?"

"Ago! Master Philip, dear! ye would not name that terrible-looking creature with the pretty, fresh, kindly face!"

"Faces change, you see; no matter what she's like; it's her talk that frightens me. She wants to make use of me; and, you see, it is like getting a share in my mind, and a voice in my thoughts, and a command over me gradually; and it is just one idea, as straight as a line of light across the lake — see what she's come to. O Lord, help me!"

"Well, now, don't you be talkin' like that. It is just a little bit dowly and troubled, because the master says a wry word now and then; and so ye let your spirits go down, don't ye see, and all sorts o' fancies comes into your head."

"There's no fancy in my head," he said with a quick look of suspicion; "only you asked me what I dreamed. I don't care if all the world knew. I dreamed I went down a flight of steps under the lake, and got a message. There are no steps near Snakes Island, we all know that," and he laughed chillily. "I'm out of spirits, as you say; and — and — O dear! I wish — Mrs. Julaper — I wish I was in my coffin, and quiet."

"Now that's very wrong of you, Master Philip; you should think of all the blessings you have, and not be makin' mountains o' molehills; and those little bits o' temper Sir Bale shows, why, no one minds 'em — that is, to take 'em to heart like you do, don't ye see?"

"I daresay; I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you are right. I'm unreasonable often, I know," said gentle Philip Feltram. "I daresay I make too much of it; I'll try. I'm his secretary, and I know I'm not so bright as he is, and it is natural he should sometimes be a little impatient; I ought to be more reasonable, I'm sure. It is all that thing that has been disturbing me — I mean fretting, and, I think, I'm not quite well; and — and letting myself think too much of vexations. It's my own fault, I'm sure, Mrs. Julaper; and I know I'm to blame."

"That's quite right, that's spoken like a wise lad; only I don't say you're to blame, nor no one; for folk can't help frettin' sometimes, no more than they can help a headache — none but a mafflin would say that — and I'll not deny but he has dowly ways when the fit's on him, and he frumps us all round, if such be his humour. But who is there hasn't his faults? We must bear and forbear, and take what we get and be cheerful. So chirp up, my lad; Philip, didn't I often ring the a'd rhyme in your ear long ago?"

"Be always as merry as ever you can,  
For no one delights in a sorrowful man.

"So don't ye be gettin' up off your chair like that, and tramping about the room wi' your hands in your pockets, looking out o' this window, and staring out o' that, and sighing and crying, and looking so black-ox-trodden, 'twould break a body's heart to see you. Ye must be cheery; and happen you're hungry, and don't know it. I'll tell the cook to grill a hot bit for ye."

"But I'm not hungry, Mrs. Julaper. How kind you are! dear me, Mrs. Julaper, I'm not worthy of it; I don't deserve half your kindness. I'd have been heartbroken long ago, but for you."

"And I'll make a sup of something hot for you; you'll take a rummer-glass of punch — you must."

"But I like the tea better; I do, indeed, Mrs. Julaper."

"Tea is no drink for a man when his heart's down. It should be something with a leg in it, lad; something hot that will warm your courage for ye, and set your blood a-dancing, and make ye talk brave and merry; and will you have a bit of a broil first? No? Well then, you'll have a drop o' punch? — ye sha'n't say no."

And so, all resistance overpowered, the consolation of Philip Feltram proceeded.

A gentler spirit than poor Feltram, a more goodnatured soul than the old housekeeper, were nowhere among the children of earth.

Philip Feltram, who was reserved enough elsewhere, used to come into her room and cry, and take her by both hands piteously, standing before her and looking down in her face, while tears ran deviously down his cheeks.

"Did you ever know such a case? was there ever a fellow like *me*? did you ever *know* such a thing? You know what I am, Mrs. Julaper, and who I am. They call me Feltram; but Sir Bale knows as well as I that my true name is not that. I'm Philip Mardykes; and another fellow would make a row about it, and claim his name and his rights, as she is always croaking in my ear I ought. But you know that is not reasonable. My grandmother was married; she was the true Lady Mardykes; *think* what it was to see a woman like that turned out of doors, and her children robbed of their name. O, ma'am, you *can't* think it; unless you were me, you couldn't — you couldn't — you couldn't!"

"Come, come, Master Philip, don't you be taking on so; and ye mustn't be talking like that, d'ye mind? You know he wouldn't stand that; and it's an old story now, and there's naught can be proved concerning it; and what I think is this — I wouldn't wonder the poor lady was beguiled. But anyhow she surely thought she was his lawful wife; and though the law may hev found a flaw somewhere — and I take it 'twas so — yet sure I am she was an honourable lady. But where's the use of stirring that old sorrow? or how can ye prove aught? and the dead hold their peace, you know; dead mice, they say, feels no cold; and dead folks are past fooling. So don't you talk like that; for stone walls have ears, and ye might say that ye couldn't *unsay*; and death's day is doom's day. So leave all in the keeping of God; and, above all, never lift hand when ye can't strike."

"Lift my hand! O, Mrs. Julaper, you couldn't think that; you little know me; I did not mean that; I never dreamed of hurting Sir Bale. Good heavens! Mrs. Julaper, you couldn't think that! It all comes of my poor impatient temper, and complaining as I do, and my misery; but O, Mrs. Julaper, you could not think I ever meant to trouble him by law, or any other annoyance! I'd like to see a stain removed from my family, and my name restored; but to touch his property, O, no! — O, no! that never entered my mind, by heaven! that never entered my mind, Mrs. Julaper. I'm not cruel; I'm not rapacious; I don't care for money; don't you know that, Mrs. Julaper? O, surely you won't think me capable of attacking the man whose bread I have eaten so long! I never dreamed of it; I should hate myself. Tell me you don't believe it; O, Mrs. Julaper, say you don't!"

And the gentle feeble creature burst into tears and good Mrs. Julaper comforted him with kind words; and he said,

"Thank you, ma'am; thank you. God knows I would not hurt Bale, nor give him one uneasy hour. It is only this: that I'm — I'm so miserable; and I'm only casting in my mind where to turn to, and what to do. So little a thing would be enough, and then I shall leave Mardykes. I'll go; not in any anger, Mrs. Julaper — don't think that; but I can't stay, I must be gone."

"Well, now, there's nothing yet, Master Philip, to fret you like that. You should not be talking so wild-like. Master Bale has his sharp word and his short temper now and again; but I'm sure he likes you. If he didn't, he'd a-said so to me long ago. I'm sure he likes you well."

"Hollo! I say, who's there? Where the devil's Mr. Feltram?" called the voice of the baronet, at a fierce pitch, along the passage.

"La! Mr. Feltram, it's him! Ye'd better run to him," whispered Mrs. Julaper.

"D — n me! does nobody hear? Mrs. Julaper! Hollo! ho! house, there! ho! D — n me, will nobody answer?"

And Sir Bale began to slap the wainscot fast and furiously with his walking-cane with a clatter like a harlequin's lath in a pantomime.

Mrs. Julaper, a little paler than usual, opened her door, and stood with the handle in her hand, making a little curtsy, enframed in the door-case; and Sir Bale, being in a fume, when he saw her, ceased whacking the panels of the corridor, and stamped on the floor, crying,

"Upon my soul, ma'am, I'm glad to see you! Perhaps you can tell me where Feltram is?"

"He is in my room, Sir Bale. Shall I tell him you want him, please?"

"Never mind; thanks," said the Baronet. "I've a tongue in my head;" marching down the passage to the housekeeper's room, with his cane clutched hard, glaring savagely, and with his teeth fast set, like a fellow advancing to beat a vicious horse that has chafed his temper.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Bank Note*

Sir Bale brushed by the housekeeper as he strode into her sanctuary, and there found Philip Feltram awaiting him dejectedly, but with no signs of agitation.

If one were to judge by the appearance the master of Mardykes presented, very grave surmises as to impending violence would have suggested themselves; but though he clutched his cane so hard that it quivered in his grasp, he had no notion of committing the outrage of a blow. The Baronet was unusually angry notwithstanding, and stopping short about three steps away, addressed Feltram with a pale face and gleaming eyes. It was quite plain that there was something very exciting upon his mind.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Feltram; I want a word or two, if you have done your — your — whatever it is." He whisked the point of his stick towards the modest tea-tray. "I should like five minutes in the library."

The Baronet was all this time eyeing Feltram with a hard suspicious gaze, as if he expected to read in his face the shrinkings and trepidations of guilt; and then turning suddenly on his heel he led the way to his library — a good long march, with a good many turnings. He walked very fast, and was not long in getting there. And as Sir Bale reached the hearth, on which was smouldering a great log of wood, and turned about suddenly, facing the door, Philip Feltram entered.

The Baronet looked oddly and stern — so oddly, it seemed to Feltram, that he could not take his eyes off him, and returned his grim and somewhat embarrassed gaze with a stare of alarm and speculation.

And so doing, his step was shortened, and grew slow and slower, and came quite to a stop before he had got far from the door — a wide stretch of that wide floor still intervening between him and Sir Bale, who stood upon the hearthrug, with his heels together and his back to the fire, cane in hand, like a drill-sergeant, facing him.

"Shut that door, please; that will do; come nearer now. I don't want to bawl what I have to say. Now listen."

The Baronet cleared his voice and paused, with his eyes upon Feltram.

"It is only two or three days ago," said he, "that you said you wished you had a hundred pounds. Am I right?"

"Yes; I think so."

"*Think?* you know it, sir, devilish well. You said that you wished to get away. I have nothing particular to say against that, more especially now. Do you understand what I say?"

"Understand, Sir Bale? I do, sir — quite."

"I daresay quite" he repeated with an angry sneer. "Here, sir, is an odd coincidence: you want a hundred pounds, and you can't earn it, and you can't borrow it — there's another way, it seems — but I have got it — a Bank-of-England note of £100 — locked up in that desk;" and he poked the end of his cane against the brass lock of it viciously. "There it is, and there are the papers you work at; and there are two keys — I've got one and you have the other — and devil another key in or out of the house has any one living. Well, do you begin to see? Don't mind. I don't want any d — d lying about it."

Feltram was indeed beginning to see that he was suspected of something very bad, but exactly what, he was not yet sure; and being a man of that unhappy temperament which shrinks from suspicion, as others do from detection, he looked very much put out indeed.

"Ha, ha! I think we do begin to see," said Sir Bale savagely. "It's a bore, I know, troubling a fellow with a story that he knows before; but I'll make mine short. When I take my key, intending to send the note to pay the crown and quit-rents that you know — you — you — no matter — you know well enough must be paid, I open it so — and so — and look *there*, where I left it, for my note; and the note's gone — you understand, the note's *gone!*"

Here was a pause, during which, under the Baronet's hard insulting eye, poor Feltram winced, and cleared his voice, and essayed to speak, but said nothing.

"It's gone, and we know where. Now, Mr. Feltram, I did not steal that note, and no one but you and I have access to this desk. You wish to go away, and I have no objection to that — but d — n me if you take away that note with you; and you may as well produce it now and here, as hereafter in a worse place."

"O, my good heaven!" exclaimed poor Feltram at last. "I'm very ill."

"So you are, of course. It takes a stiff emetic to get all that money off a fellow's stomach; and it's like parting with a tooth to give up a banknote. Of course you're ill, but that's no sign of innocence, and I'm no fool. You had better give the thing up quietly."

"May my Maker strike me — —"

"So He will, you d — d rascal, if there's justice in heaven, unless you produce the money. I don't want to hang you. I'm willing to let you off if you'll let me, but I'm cursed if I let my note off along with you; and unless you give it up forthwith, I'll get a warrant and have you searched, pockets, bag, and baggage."

"Lord! am I awake?" exclaimed Philip Feltram.

"Wide awake, and so am I," replied Sir Bale. "You don't happen to have got it about you?"

"God forbid, sir! O, Sir — O, Sir Bale — why, Bale, *Bale*, it's impossible! You *can't* believe it. When did I ever wrong you? You know me since I was not higher than the table, and — and — —"

He burst into tears.

"Stop your snivelling, sir, and give up the note. You know devilish well I can't spare it; and I won't spare you if you put me to it. I've said my say."

Sir Bale signed towards the door; and like a somnambulist, with dilated gaze and pale as death, Philip Feltram, at his wit's end, went out of the room. It was not till he had again reached the housekeeper's door that he recollected in what direction he was

going. His shut hand was pressed with all his force to his heart, and the first breath he was conscious of was a deep wild sob or two that quivered from his heart as he looked from the lobby-window upon a landscape which he did not see.

All he had ever suffered before was mild in comparison with this dire paroxysm. Now, for the first time, was he made acquainted with his real capacity for pain, and how near he might be to madness and yet retain intellect enough to weigh every scruple, and calculate every chance and consequence, in his torture.

Sir Bale, in the meantime, had walked out a little more excited than he would have allowed. He was still convinced that Feltram had stolen the note, but not quite so certain as he had been. There were things in his manner that confirmed, and others that perplexed, Sir Bale.

The Baronet stood upon the margin of the lake, almost under the evening shadow of the house, looking towards Snakes Island. There were two things about Mardykes he specially disliked.

One was Philip Feltram, who, right or wrong, he fancied knew more than was pleasant of his past life.

The other was the lake. It was a beautiful piece of water, his eye, educated at least in the excellences of landscape-painting, acknowledged. But although he could pull a good oar, and liked other lakes, to this particular sheet of water there lurked within him an insurmountable antipathy. It was engendered by a variety of associations.

There is a faculty in man that will acknowledge the unseen. He may scout and scare religion from him; but if he does, superstition perches near. His boding was made-up of omens, dreams, and such stuff as he most affected to despise, and there fluttered at his heart a presentiment and disgust.

His foot was on the gunwale of the boat, that was chained to its ring at the margin; but he would not have crossed that water in it for any reason that man could urge.

What was the mischief that sooner or later was to befall him from that lake, he could not define; but that some fatal danger lurked there, was the one idea concerning it that had possession of his fancy.

He was now looking along its still waters, towards the copse and rocks of Snakes Island, thinking of Philip Feltram; and the yellow level sunbeams touched his dark features, that bore a saturnine resemblance to those of Charles II, and marked sharply their firm grim lines, and left his deep-set eyes in shadow.

Who has the happy gift to seize the present, as a child does, and live in it? Who is not often looking far off for his happiness, as Sidney Smith says, like a man looking for his hat when it is upon his head? Sir Bale was brooding over his double hatred, of Feltram and of the lake. It would have been better had he struck down the raven that croaked upon his shoulder, and listened to the harmless birds that were whistling all round among the branches in the golden sunset.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Feltram's Plan*

This horror of the beautiful lake, which other people thought so lovely, was, in that mind which affected to scoff at the unseen, a distinct creation of downright superstition.

The nursery tales which had scared him in his childhood were founded on the tragedy of Snakes Island, and haunted him with an unavowed persistence still. Strange dreams untold had visited him, and a German conjuror, who had made some strangely successful vaticinations, had told him that his worst enemy would come up to him from a lake. He had heard very nearly the same thing from a fortuneteller in France; and once at Lucerne, when he was waiting alone in his room for the hour at which he had appointed to go upon the lake, all being quiet, there came to the window, which was open, a sunburnt, lean, wicked face. Its ragged owner leaned his arm on the window-frame, and with his head in the room, said in his patois, "Ho! waiting are you? You'll have enough of the lake one day. Don't you mind watching; they'll send when you're wanted;" and twisting his yellow face into a malicious distortion, he went on.

This thing had occurred so suddenly, and chimed-in so oddly with his thoughts, which were at that moment at distant Mardykes and the haunted lake, that it disconcerted him. He laughed, he looked out of the window. He would have given that fellow money to tell him why he said that. But there was no good in looking for the scamp; he was gone.

A memory not preoccupied with that lake and its omens, and a presentiment about himself, would not have noted such things. But *his* mind they touched indelibly; and he was ashamed of his childish slavery, but could not help it.

The foundation of all this had been laid in the nursery, in the winter's tales told by its fireside, and which seized upon his fancy and his fears with a strange congeniality.

There is a large bedroom at Mardykes Hall, which tradition assigns to the lady who had perished tragically in the lake. Mrs. Julaper was sure of it; for her aunt, who died a very old woman twenty years before, remembered the time of the lady's death, and when she grew to woman's estate had opportunity in abundance; for the old people who surrounded her could remember forty years farther back, and tell everything connected with the old house in beautiful Miss Feltram's time.

This large oldfashioned room, commanding a view of Snakes Island, the fells, and the lake — somewhat vast and gloomy, and furnished in a stately old fashion — was said to be haunted, especially when the wind blew from the direction of Golden Friars, the point from which it blew on the night of her death in the lake; or when the sky was overcast, and thunder rolled among the lofty fells, and lightning gleamed on the wide sheet of water.

It was on a night like this that a lady visitor, who long after that event occupied, in entire ignorance of its supernatural character, that large room; and being herself a lady of a picturesque turn, and loving the grander melodrama of Nature, bid her maid leave the shutters open, and watched the splendid effects from her bed, until, the storm being still distant, she fell asleep.

It was travelling slowly across the lake, and it was the deep-mouthed clangour of its near approach that startled her, at dead of night, from her slumber, to witness the same phenomena in the tremendous loudness and brilliancy of their near approach.

At this magnificent spectacle she was looking with the awful ecstasy of an observer in whom the sense of danger is subordinated to that of the sublime, when she saw suddenly at the window a woman, whose long hair and dress seemed drenched with water. She was gazing in with a look of terror, and was shaking the sash of the window with vehemence. Having stood there for a few seconds, and before the lady, who beheld all this from her bed, could make up her mind what to do, the storm-beaten figure, wringing her hands, seemed to throw herself backward, and was gone.

Possessed with the idea that she had seen some poor woman overtaken in the storm, who, failing to procure admission there, had gone round to some of the many doors of the mansion, and obtained an entry there, she again fell asleep.

It was not till the morning, when she went to her window to look out upon the now tranquil scene, that she discovered what, being a stranger to the house, she had quite forgotten, that this room was at a great height — some thirty feet — from the ground.

Another story was that of good old Mr. Randal Rymer, who was often a visitor at the house in the late Lady Mardykes' day. In his youth he had been a campaigner; and now that he was a preacher he maintained his hardy habits, and always slept, summer and winter, with a bit of his window up. Being in that room in his bed, and after a short sleep lying awake, the moon shining softly through the window, there passed by that aperture into the room a figure dressed, it seemed to him, in gray that was nearly white. It passed straight to the hearth, where was an expiring wood fire; and cowering over it with outstretched hands, it appeared to be gathering what little heat was to be had. Mr. Rymer, amazed and awestruck, made a movement in his bed; and the figure looked round, with large eyes that in the moonlight looked like melting snow, and stretching its long arms up the chimney, they and the figure itself seemed to blend with the smoke, and so pass up and away.

Sir Bale, I have said, did not like Feltram. His father, Sir William, had left a letter creating a trust, it was said, in favour of Philip Feltram. The document had been found with the will, addressed to Sir Bale in the form of a letter.

"That is mine," said the Baronet, when it dropped out of the will; and he slipped it into his pocket, and no one ever saw it after.

But Mr. Charles Twyne, the attorney of Golden Friars, whenever he got drunk, which was pretty often, used to tell his friends with a grave wink that he knew a thing or two about that letter. It gave Philip Feltram two hundred a-year, charged on Harfax. It was only a direction. It made Sir Bale a trustee, however; and having made away with the "letter," the Baronet had been robbing Philip Feltram ever since.

Old Twyne was cautious, even in his cups, in his choice of an audience, and was a little enigmatical in his revelations. For he was afraid of Sir Bale, though he hated him for employing a lawyer who lived seven miles away, and was a rival. So people were not quite sure whether Mr. Twyne was telling lies or truth, and the principal fact that corroborated his story was Sir Bale's



manifest hatred of his secretary. In fact, Sir Bale's retaining him in his house, detesting him as he seemed to do, was not easily to be accounted for, except on the principle of a tacit compromise — a miserable compensation for having robbed him of his rights.

The battle about the banknote proceeded. Sir Bale certainly had doubts, and vacillated; for moral evidence made powerfully in favour of poor Feltram, though the evidence of circumstance made as powerfully against him. But Sir Bale admitted suspicion easily, and in weighing probabilities would count a virtue very lightly against temptation and opportunity; and whatever his doubts might sometimes be, he resisted and quenched them, and never let that ungrateful scoundrel Philip Feltram so much as suspect their existence.

For two days Sir Bale had not spoken to Feltram. He passed by on stair and passage, carrying his head high, and with a thundrous countenance, rolling conclusions and revenges in his soul.

Poor Feltram all this time existed in one long agony. He would have left Mardykes, were it not that he looked vaguely to some just power — to chance itself — against this hideous imputation. To go with this indictment ringing in his ears, would amount to a confession and flight.

Mrs. Julaper consoled him with might and main. She was a sympathetic and trusting spirit, and knew poor Philip Feltram, in her simplicity, better than the shrewdest profligate on earth could have known him. She cried with him in his misery. She was fired with indignation by these suspicions, and still more at what followed.

Sir Bale showed no signs of relenting. It might have been that he was rather glad of so unexceptionable an opportunity of getting rid of Feltram, who, people thought, knew something which it galled the Baronet's pride that he should know.

The Baronet had another shorter and sterner interview with Feltram in his study. The result was, that unless he restored the missing note before ten o'clock next morning, he should leave Mardykes.

To leave Mardykes was no more than Philip Feltram, feeble as he was of will, had already resolved. But what was to become of him? He did not very much care, if he could find any calling, however humble, that would just give him bread.

There was an old fellow and his wife (an ancient dame,) who lived at the other side of the lake, on the old territories of the Feltrams, and who, from some tradition of loyalty, perhaps, were fond of poor Philip Feltram. They lived somewhat high up on the fells — about as high as trees would grow — and those which were clumped about their rude dwelling were nearly the last you passed in your ascent of the mountain. These people had a multitude of sheep and goats, and lived in their airy solitude a pastoral and simple life, and were childless. Philip Feltram was hardy and active, having passed his early days among that arduous scenery. Cold and rain did not trouble him; and these people being wealthy in their way, and loving him, would be glad to find him employment of that desultory pastoral kind which would best suit him.

This vague idea was the only thing resembling a plan in his mind.

When Philip Feltram came to Mrs. Julaper's room, and told her that he had made up his mind to leave the house forthwith — to cross the lake to the Cloostedd side in Tom Marlin's boat, and then to make his way up the hill alone to Trebeck's lonely farmstead, Mrs. Julaper was overwhelmed.

"Ye'll do no such thing tonight, anyhow. You're not to go like that. Ye'll come into the small room here, where he can't follow; and we'll sit down and talk it over a bit, and ye'll find 'twill all come straight; and this will be no night, anyhow, for such a march. Why, man, 'twould take an hour and more to cross the lake, and then a long uphill walk before ye could reach Trebeck's place; and if the night should fall while you were still on the mountain, ye might lose your life among the rocks. It can't be 'tis come to that yet; and the call was in the air, I'm told, all yesterday, and distant thunder to-day, travelling this way over Blarwyn Fells; and 'twill be a night no one will be out, much less on the mountain side."

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Crazy Parson*

Mrs. Julaper had grown weatherwise, living for so long among this noble and solitary scenery, where people must observe Nature or else nothing — where signs of coming storm or change are almost local, and record themselves on particular cliffs and mountain-peaks, or in the mists, or in mirrored tints of the familiar lake, and are easily learned or remembered. At all events, her presage proved too true.

The sun had set an hour and more. It was dark; and an awful thunderstorm, whose march, like the distant reverberations of an invading army, had been faintly heard beyond the barriers of Blarwyn Fells throughout the afternoon, was near them now, and had burst in deep-mouthed battle among the ravines at the other side, and over the broad lake, that glared like a sheet of burnished steel under its flashes of dazzling blue. Wild and fitful blasts sweeping down the hollows and cloughs of the fells of Golden Friars agitated the lake, and bent the trees low, and whirled away their sere leaves in melancholy drift in their tremendous gusts. And from the window, looking on a scene enveloped in more than the darkness of the night, you saw in the pulsations of the lightning, before “the speedy gleams the darkness swallowed,” the tossing trees and the flying foam and eddies on the lake.

In the midst of the hurlyburly, a loud and long knocking came at the hall-door of Mardykes. How long it had lasted before a chance lull made it audible I do not know.

There was nothing picturesquely poor, any more than there were evidences of wealth, anywhere in Sir Bale Mardykes’ household. He had no lack of servants, but they were of an inexpensive and homely sort; and the hall-door being opened by the son of an old tenant on the estate — the tempest beating on the other side of the house, and comparative shelter under the gables at the front — he saw standing before him, in the agitated air, a thin old man, who muttering, it might be, a benediction, stepped into the hall, and displayed long silver tresses, just as the storm had blown them, ascetic and eager features, and a pair of large light eyes that wandered wildly. He was dressed in threadbare black; a pair of long leather gaiters, buckled high above his knee, protecting his thin shanks through moss and pool; and the singularity of his appearance was heightened by a wide-leafed felt hat, over which he had tied his handkerchief, so as to bring the leaf of it over his ears, and to secure it from being whirled from his head by the storm.

This odd and storm-beaten figure — tall, and a little stooping, as well as thin — was not unknown to the servant, who saluted him with something of fear as well as of respect as he bid him reverently welcome, and asked him to come in and sit by the fire.

“Get you to your master, and tell him I have a message to him from one he has not seen for two-and-forty years.”

As the old man, with his harsh old voice, thus spoke, he unknotted his handkerchief and bet the rain-drops from his hat upon his knee.

The servant knocked at the library-door, where he found Sir Bale.

“Well, what’s the matter?” cried Sir Bale sharply, from his chair before the fire, with angry eyes looking over his shoulder.

“Here’s ‘t sir cumman, Sir Bale,” he answered.

“Sir,” or “the Sir,” is still used as the clergyman’s title in the Northumbrian counties.

“What sir?”

“Sir Hugh Creswell, if you please, Sir Bale.”

“Ho! — mad Creswell? — O, the crazy parson. Well, tell Mrs. Julaper to let him have some supper — and — and to let him have a bed in some suitable place. That’s what he wants. These mad fellows know what they are about.”

“No, Sir Bale Mardykes, that is not what he wants,” said the loud wild voice of the daft sir over the servant’s shoulder. “Often has Mardykes Hall given me share of its cheer and its shelter and the warmth of its fire; and I bless the house that has been an inn to the wayfarer of the Lord. But tonight I go up the lake to Pindar’s Bield, three miles on; and there I rest and refresh — not here.”

“And why not *here*, Mr. Creswell?” asked the Baronet; for about this crazy old man, who preached in the fields, and appeared and disappeared so suddenly in the orbit of his wide and unknown perambulations of those northern and border counties, there was that sort of superstitious feeling which attaches to the mysterious and the good — an idea that it was lucky to harbour and dangerous to offend him. No one knew whence he came or whither he went. Once in a year, perhaps, he might appear at a lonely farmstead door among the fells, salute the house, enter, and be gone in the morning. His life was austere; his piety enthusiastic, severe, and tinged with the craze which inspired among the rustic population a sort of awe.

“I’ll not sleep at Mardykes tonight; neither will I eat, nor drink, nor sit me down — no, nor so much as stretch my hands to the fire. As the man of God came out of Judah to king Jeroboam, so come I to you, sent by a vision, to bear a warning; and as he said, ‘If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place,’ so also say I.”

“Do as you please,” said Sir Bale, a little sulkily. “Say your say; and you are welcome to stay or go, if go you will on so mad a night as this.”

“Leave us,” said Creswell, beckoning the servant back with his thin hands; “what I have to say is to your master.”

The servant went, in obedience to a gesture from Sir Bale, and shut the door.

The old man drew nearer to the Baronet, and lowering his loud stern voice a little, and interrupting his discourse from time to time, to allow the near thunder-peals to subside, he said,

“Answer me, Sir Bale — what is this that has chanced between you and Philip Feltram?”

The Baronet, under the influence of that blunt and peremptory demand, told him shortly and sternly enough.

“And of all these facts you are sure, else ye would not blast your early companion and kinsman with the name of thief?”

"I *am* sure," said Sir Bale grimly.

"Unlock that cabinet," said the old man with the long white locks.

"I've no objection," said Sir Bale; and he did unlock an old oak cabinet that stood, carved in high relief with strange figures and gothic grotesques, against the wall, opposite the fireplace. On opening it there were displayed a system of little drawers and pigeon-holes such as we see in more modern *escritoires*.

"Open that drawer with the red mark of a seal upon it," continued Hugh Creswell, pointing to it with his lank finger.

Sir Bale did so; and to his momentary amazement, and even consternation, there lay the missing note, which now, with one of those sudden caprices of memory which depend on the laws of suggestion and association, he remembered having placed there with his own hand.

"That is it," said old Creswell with a pallid smile, and fixing his wild eyes on the Baronet. The smile subsided into a frown, and said he: "Last night I slept near Haworth Moss; and your father came to me in a dream, and said: 'My son Bale accuses Philip of having stolen a banknote from his desk. He forgets that he himself placed it in his cabinet. Come with me.' I was, in the spirit, in this room; and he led me to this cabinet, which he opened; and in that drawer he showed me that note. 'Go,' said he, 'and tell him to ask Philip Feltram's pardon, else he will but go in weakness to return in power;' and he said that which it is not lawful to repeat. My message is told. Now a word from myself," he added sternly. "The dead, through my lips, has spoken, and under God's thunder and lightning his words have found ye. Why so uppish wi' Philip Feltram? See how ye threaped, and yet were wrong. He's no tazzle — he's no taggelt. Ask his pardon. Ye must change, or he will no taggelt. Go, in weakness, come in power: mark ye the words. 'Twill make a peal that will be heard in toon and desert, in the swirls o' the mountain, through pikes and valleys, and mak' a waaly man o' thee."

The old man with these words, uttered in the broad northern dialect of his common speech, strode from the room and shut the door. In another minute he was forth into the storm, pursuing what remained of his long march to Pindar's Bield.

"Upon my soul!" said Sir Bale, recovering from his sort of stun which the sudden and strange visit had left, "that's a cool old fellow! Come to rate me and teach me my own business in my own house!" and he rapped out a fierce oath. "Change his mind or no, here he sha'n't stay tonight — not an hour."

Sir Bale was in the lobby in a moment, and thundered to his servants:

"I say, put that fool out of the door — put him out by the shoulder, and never let him put his foot inside it more!"

But the old man's yea was yea, and his nay nay. He had quite meant what he said; and, as I related, was beyond the reach of the indignity of extrusion.

Sir Bale on his return shut his door as violently as if it were in the face of the old prophet.

"Ask Feltram's pardon, by Jove! For what? Why, any jury on earth would have hanged him on half the evidence; and I, like a fool, was going to let him off with his liberty and my hundred pound-note! Ask his pardon indeed!"

Still there were misgivings in his mind; a consciousness that he did owe explanation and apology to Feltram, and an insurmountable reluctance to undertake either. The old dislike — a contempt mingled with fear — not any fear of his malevolence, a fear only of his carelessness and folly; for, as I have said, Feltram knew many things, it was believed, of the Baronet's Continental and Asiatic life, and had even gently remonstrated with him upon the dangers into which he was running. A simple fellow like Philip Feltram is a dangerous depository of a secret. This Baronet was proud, too; and the mere possession of his secrets by Feltram was an involuntary insult, which Sir Bale could not forgive. He wished him far away; and except for the recovery of his banknote, which he could ill spare, he was sorry that this suspicion was cleared up.

The thunder and storm were unabated; it seemed indeed that they were growing wilder and more awful.

He opened the window-shutter and looked out upon that sublimest of scenes; and so intense and magnificent were its phenomena, that Sir Bale, for a while, was absorbed in this contemplation.

When he turned about, the sight of his £100 note, still between his finger and thumb, made him smile grimly.

The more he thought of it, the clearer it was that he could not leave matters exactly as they were. Well, what should he do? He would send for Mrs. Julaper, and tell her vaguely that he had changed his mind about Feltram, and that he might continue to stay at Mardykes Hall as usual. That would suffice. She could speak to Feltram.

He sent for her; and soon, in the lulls of the great uproar without, he could hear the jingle of Mrs. Julaper's keys and her light tread upon the lobby.

"Mrs. Julaper," said the Baronet, in his dry careless way, "Feltram may remain; your eloquence has prevailed. What have you been crying about?" he asked, observing that his housekeeper's usually cheerful face was, in her own phrase, 'all cried.'

"It is too late, sir; he's gone."

"And when did he go?" asked Sir Bale, a little put out. "He chose an odd evening, didn't he? So like him!"

"He went about half an hour ago; and I'm very sorry, sir; it's a sore sight to see the poor lad going from the place he was reared in, and a hard thing, sir; and on such a night, above all."

"No one asked him to go tonight. Where is he gone to?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; he left my room, sir, when I was upstairs; and Janet saw him pass the window not ten minutes after Mr. Creswell left the house."

"Well, then, there's no good, Mrs. Julaper, in thinking more about it; he has settled the matter his own way; and as he so ordains it — amen, say I. Goodnight."

## CHAPTER X

### *Adventure in Tom Marlin's Boat*

Philip Feltram was liked very well — a gentle, kindly, and very timid creature, and, before he became so heartbroken, a fellow who liked a joke or a pleasant story, and could laugh heartily. Where will Sir Bale find so unresisting and respectful a butt and retainer? and whom will he bully now?

Something like remorse was worrying Sir Bale's heart a little; and the more he thought on the strange visit of Hugh Creswell that night, with its unexplained menace, the more uneasy he became.

The storm continued; and even to him there seemed something exaggerated and inhuman in the severity of his expulsion on such a night. It was his own doing, it was true; but would people believe that? and would he have thought of leaving Mardykes at all if it had not been for his kinsman's severity? Nay, was it not certain that if Sir Bale had done as Hugh Creswell had urged him, and sent for Feltram forthwith, and told him how all had been cleared up, and been a little friendly with him, he would have found him still in the house? — for he had not yet gone for ten minutes after Creswell's departure, and thus, all that was to follow might have been averted. But it was too late now, and Sir Bale would let the affair take its own course.

Below him, outside the window at which he stood ruminating, he heard voices mingling with the storm. He could with tolerable certainty perceive, looking into the obscurity, that there were three men passing close under it, carrying some very heavy burden among them.

He did not know what these three black figures in the obscurity were about. He saw them pass round the corner of the building toward the front, and in the lulls of the storm could hear their gruff voices talking.

We have all experienced what a presentiment is, and we all know with what an intuition the faculty of observation is sometimes heightened. It was such an apprehension as sometimes gives its peculiar horror to a dream — a sort of knowledge that what those people were about was in a dreadful way connected with his own fate.

He watched for a time, thinking that they might return; but they did not. He was in a state of uncomfortable suspense.

"If they want me, they won't have much trouble in finding me, nor any scruple, egad, in plaguing me; they never have."

Sir Bale returned to his letters, a score of which he was that night getting off his conscience — an arrear which would not have troubled him had he not ceased, for two or three days, altogether to employ Philip Feltram, who had been accustomed to take all that sort of drudgery off his hands.

All the time he was writing now he had a feeling that the shadows he had seen pass under his window were machinating some trouble for him, and an uneasy suspense made him lift his eyes now and then to the door, fancying sounds and footsteps; and after a resultless wait he would say to himself, "If any one is coming, why the devil don't he come?" and then he would apply himself again to his letters.

But on a sudden he heard good Mrs. Julaper's step trotting along the lobby, and the tiny ringing of her keys.

Here was news coming; and the Baronet stood up looking at the door, on which presently came a hurried rapping; and before he had answered, in the midst of a long thunderclap that suddenly broke, rattling over the house, the good woman opened the door in great agitation, and cried with a tremulous uplifting of her hands.

"O, Sir Bale! O, la, sir! here's poor dear Philip Feltram come home dead!"

Sir Bale stared at her sternly for some seconds.

"Gome, now, do be distinct," said Sir Bale; "what has happened?"

"He's lying on the sofer in the old still-room. You never saw — my God! — O, sir — what is life?"

"D — n it, can't you cry by-and-by, and tell me what's the matter now?"

"A bit o' fire there, as luck would have it; but what is hot or cold now? La, sir, they're all doin' what they can; he's drowned, sir, and Tom Warren is on the gallop down to Golden Friars for Doctor Torvey."

"Is he drowned, or is it only a ducking? Come, bring me to the place. Dead men don't usually want a fire, or consult doctors. I'll see for myself."

So Sir Bale Mardykes, pale and grim, accompanied by the light-footed Mrs. Julaper, strode along the passages, and was led by her into the old still-room, which had ceased to be used for its original purpose. All the servants in the house were now collected there, and three men also who lived by the margin of the lake; one of them thoroughly drenched, with rivulets of water still trickling from his sleeves, water along the wrinkles and pockets of his waistcoat and from the feet of his trousers, and pumping and oozing from his shoes, and streaming from his hair down the channels of his cheeks like a continuous rain of tears.

The people drew back a little as Sir Bale entered with a quick step and a sharp pallid frown on his face. There was a silence as he stooped over Philip Feltram, who lay on a low bed next the wall, dimly lighted by two or three candles here and there about the room.

He laid his hand, for a moment, on his cold wet breast.

Sir Bale knew what should be done in order to give a man in such a case his last chance for life. Everybody was speedily put in motion. Philip's drenched clothes were removed, hot blankets enveloped him, warming-pans and hot bricks lent their aid; he was placed at the prescribed angle, so that the water flowed freely from his mouth. The old expedient for inducing artificial breathing was employed, and a lusty pair of bellows did duty for his lungs.

But these helps to life, and suggestions to nature, availed not. Forlorn and peaceful lay the features of poor Philip Feltram; cold and dull to the touch; no breath through the blue lips; no sight in the fish-like eyes; pulseless and cold in the midst of all the hot bricks and warming-pans about him.

At length, everything having been tried, Sir Bale, who had been directing, placed his hand within the clothes, and laid it silently on Philip's shoulder and over his heart; and after a little wait, he shook his head, and looking down on his sunken face,

he said,

"I am afraid he's gone. Yes, he's gone, poor fellow! And bear you this in mind, all of you; Mrs. Julaper there can tell you more about it. She knows that it was certainly in no compliance with my wish that he left the house tonight: it was his own obstinate perversity, and perhaps — I forgive him for it — a wish in his unreasonable resentment to throw some blame upon this house, as having refused him shelter on such a night; than which imputation nothing can be more utterly false. Mrs. Julaper there knows how welcome he was to stay the night; but he would not; he had made up his mind, it seems, without telling any person. Had he told you, Mrs. Julaper?"

"No, sir," sobbed Mrs. Julaper from the centre of a pocket-handkerchief in which her face was buried.

"Not a human being: an angry whim of his own. Poor Feltram! and here's the result," said the Baronet. "We have done our best — done everything. I don't think the doctor, when he comes, will say that anything has been omitted; but all won't do. Does any one here know how it happened?"

Two men knew very well — the man who had been ducked, and his companion, a younger man, who was also in the still-room, and had lent a hand in carrying Feltram up to the house.

Tom Marlin had a queer old stone tenement by the edge of the lake just under Mardykes Hall. Some people said it was the stump of an old tower that had once belonged to Mardykes Castle, of which in the modern building scarcely a relic was discoverable.

This Tom Marlin had an ancient right of fishing in the lake, where he caught pike enough for all Golden Friars; and keeping a couple of boats, he made money beside by ferrying passengers over now and then. This fellow, with a furrowed face and shaggy eyebrows, bald at top, but with long grizzled locks falling upon his shoulders, said,

"He wer wi' me this mornin', sayin' he'd want t' boat to cross the lake in, but he didn't say what hour; and when it came on to thunder and blow like this, ye guess I did not look to see him tonight. Well, my wife was just lightin' a pigtail — tho' light enough and to spare there was in the lift already — when who should come clatterin' at the latch-pin in the blow o' thunder and wind but Philip, poor lad, himself; and an ill hour for him it was. He's been some time in ill fettle, though he was never frowsy, not he, but always kind and dooce, and canty once, like anither; and he asked me to tak the boat across the lake at once to the Clough o' Cloostedd at t'other side. The woman took the pet and wodn't hear o't; and, 'Dall me, if I go tonight,' quoth I. But he would not be put off so, not he; and dingdrive he went to it, cryin' and putrein' ye'd a-said, poor fellow, he was wrang i' his garrets a'most. So at long last I bethought me, there's nout o' a sea to the north o' Snakes Island, so I'll pull him by that side — for the storm is blowin' right up by Golden Friars, ye mind — and when we get near the point, thinks I, he'll see wi' his een how the lake is, and gie it up. For I liked him, poor lad; and seein' he'd set his heart on't, I wouldn't vex nor frump him wi' a no. So down we three — myself, and Bill there, and Philip Feltram — come to the boat; and we pulled out, keeping Snakes Island atwixt us and the wind. 'Twas smooth water wi' us, for 'twas a scug there, but white enough was all beyont the point; and passing the finger-stone, not forty fathom from the shore o' the island, Bill and me pullin' and he sittin' in the stern, poor lad, up he rises, a bit rabblin' to himself, wi' his hands lifted so.

"Look a-head!" says I, thinkin' something wos comin' atort us.

"But 'twasn't that. The boat was quiet, for while we looked, oo'er our shouthers, oo'er her bows, we didn't pull, so she lay still; and lookin' back again on Philip, he was rabblin' on all the same.

"It's nobbut a prass wi' himsel", poor lad," thinks I.

"But that wasn't it neither; for I sid something white come out o' t' water, by the gunwale, like a hand. By Jen! and he leans oo'er and tuk it; and he sagged like, and so it drew him in, under the mere, before I cud du nout. There was nout to thraa tu him, and no time; down he went, and I followed; and thrice I dived before I found him, and brought him up by the hair at last; and there he is, poor lad! and all one if he lay at the bottom o' t' mere."

As Tom Marlin ended his narrative — often interrupted by the noise of the tempest without, and the peals of thunder that echoed awfully above, like the chorus of a melancholy ballad — the sudden clang of the hall-door bell, and a more faintly-heard knocking, announced a new arrival.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Sir Bale's Dream*

It was Doctor Torvey who entered the old still-room now, buttoned-up to the chin in his greatcoat, and with a muffler of many colours wrapped partly over that feature.

"Well! — hey? So poor Feltram's had an accident?"

The Doctor was addressing Sir Bale, and getting to the bedside as he pulled off his gloves.

"I see you've been keeping him warm — that's right; and a considerable flow of water from his mouth; turn him a little that way. Hey? O, ho!" said the Doctor, as he placed his hand upon Philip, and gently stirred his limbs. "It's more than an hour since this happened. I'm afraid there's very little to be done now;" and in a lower tone, with his hand on poor Philip Feltram's arm, and so down to his fingers, he said in Sir Bale Mardykes' ear, with a shake of his head,

"Here, you see, poor fellow, here's the cadaveric stiffness; it's very melancholy, but it's all over, he's gone; there's no good trying any more. Come here, Mrs. Julaper. Did you ever see any one dead? Look at his eyes, look at his mouth. You ought to have known that, with half an eye. And you know," he added again confidentially in Sir Bale's ear, "trying any more *now* is all my eye."

Then after a few more words with the Baronet, and having heard his narrative, he said from time to time, "Quite right; nothing could be better; capital practice, sir," and so forth. And at the close of all this, amid the sobs of kind Mrs. Julaper and the general whimpering of the humbler handmaids, the Doctor standing by the bed, with his knuckles on the coverlet, and a glance now and then on the dead face beside him, said — by way of 'quieting men's minds,' as the old tract-writers used to say — a few words to the following effect:

"Everything has been done here that the most experienced physician could have wished. Everything has been done in the best way. I don't know anything that has not been done, in fact. If I had been here myself, I don't know — hot bricks — salt isn't a bad thing. I don't know, I say, that anything of any consequence has been omitted." And looking at the body, "You see," and he drew the fingers a little this way and that, letting them return, as they stiffly did, to their former attitude, "you may be sure that the poor gentleman was quite dead by the time he arrived here. So, since he was laid there, nothing has been lost by delay. And, Sir Bale, if you have any directions to send to Golden Friars, sir, I shall be most happy to undertake your message."

"Nothing, thanks; it is a melancholy ending, poor fellow! You must come to the study with me, Doctor Torvey, and talk a little bit more; and — very sad, doctor — and you must have a glass of sherry, or some port — the port used not to be bad here; I don't take it — but very melancholy it is — bring some port and sherry; and, Mrs. Julaper, you'll be good enough to see that everything that should be done here is looked to; and let Marlin and the men have supper and something to drink. You have been too long in your wet clothes, Marlin."

So, with gracious words all round, he led the Doctor to the library where he had been sitting, and was affable and hospitable, and told him his own version of all that had passed between him and Philip Feltram, and presented himself in an amiable point of view, and pleased the Doctor with his port and flatteries — for he could not afford to lose anyone's good word just now; and the Doctor was a bit of a gossip, and in most houses in that region, in one character or another, every three months in the year.

So in due time the Doctor drove back to Golden Friars, with a high opinion of Sir Bale, and higher still of his port, and highest of all of himself: in the best possible humour with the world, not minding the storm that blew in his face, and which he defied in goodhumoured mock-heroics spoken in somewhat thick accents, and regarding the thunder and lightning as a lively gala of fireworks; and if there had been a chance of finding his cronies still in the George and Dragon, he would have been among them forthwith, to relate the tragedy of the night, and tell what a good fellow, after all, Sir Bale was; and what a fool, at best, poor Philip Feltram.

But the George was quiet for that night. The thunder rolled over voiceless chambers; and the lights had been put out within the windows, on whose multitudinous small panes the lightning glared. So the Doctor went home to Mrs. Torvey, whom he charmed into goodhumoured curiosity by the tale of wonder he had to relate.

Sir Bale's qualms were symptomatic of something a little less sublime and more selfish than conscience. He was not sorry that Philip Feltram was out of the way. His lips might begin to babble inconveniently at any time, and why should not his mouth be stopped? and what stopper so effectual as that plug of clay which fate had introduced? But he did not want to be charged with the odium of the catastrophe. Every man cares something for the opinion of his fellows. And seeing that Feltram had been well liked, and that his death had excited a vehement commiseration, Sir Bale did not wish it to be said that he had made the house too hot to hold him, and had so driven him to extremity.

Sir Bale's first agitation had subsided. It was now late, he had written many letters, and he was tired. It was not wonderful, then, that having turned his lounging-chair to the fire, he should have fallen asleep in it, as at last he did.

The storm was passing gradually away by this time. The thunder was now echoing among the distant glens and gorges of Daulness Fells, and the angry roar and gusts of the tempest were subsiding into the melancholy sighing and piping that soothe like a lullaby.

Sir Bale therefore had his unpremeditated sleep very comfortably, except that his head was hanging a little uneasily; which, perhaps, helped him to this dream.

It was one of those dreams in which the continuity of the waking state that immediately preceded it seems unbroken; for he thought that he was sitting in the chair which he occupied, and in the room where he actually was. It seemed to him that he got up, took a candle in his hand, and went through the passages to the old still-room where Philip Feltram lay. The house seemed perfectly still. He could hear the chirp of the crickets faintly from the distant kitchen, and the tick of the clock sounded loud and hollow along the passage. In the old still-room, as he opened the door, was no light, except what was admitted from the candle he

carried. He found the body of poor Philip Feltram just as he had left it — his gentle face, saddened by the touch of death, was turned upwards, with white lips: with traces of suffering fixed in its outlines, such as caused Sir Bale, standing by the bed, to draw the coverlet over the dead man's features, which seemed silently to upbraid him. "Gone in weakness!" said Sir Bale, repeating the words of the "daft sir," Hugh Creswell; as he did so, a voice whispered near him, with a great sigh, "Come in power!" He looked round, in his dream, but there was no one; the light seemed to fail, and a horror slowly overcame him, especially as he thought he saw the figure under the coverlet stealthily beginning to move. Backing towards the door, for he could not take his eyes off it, he saw something like a huge black ape creep out at the foot of the bed; and springing at him, it gripped him by the throat, so that he could not breathe; and a thousand voices were instantly round him, holloaing, cursing, laughing in his ears; and in this direful plight he waked.

Was it the ring of those voices still in his ears, or a real shriek, and another, and a long peal, shriek after shriek, swelling madly through the distant passages, that held him still, freezing in the horror of his dream?

I will tell you what this noise was.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Marcella Bligh and Judith Wale Keep Watch*

After his bottle of port with Sir Bale, the Doctor had gone down again to the room where poor Philip Feltram lay.

Mrs. Julaper had dried her eyes, and was busy by this time; and two old women were making all their arrangements for a night-watch by the body, which they had washed, and, as their phrase goes, 'laid out' in the humble bed where it had lain while there was still a hope that a spark sufficient to rekindle the fire of life might remain. These old women had points of resemblance: they were lean, sallow, and wonderfully wrinkled, and looked each malign and ugly enough for a witch.

Marcella Bligh's thin hooked nose was now like the beak of a bird of prey over the face of the drowned man, upon whose eyelids she was placing pennypieces, to keep them from opening; and her one eye was fixed on her work, its sightless companion showing white in its socket, with an ugly leer.

Judith Wale was lifting the pail of hot water with which they had just washed the body. She had long lean arms, a hunched back, a great sharp chin sunk on her hollow breast, and small eyes restless as a ferret's; and she clattered about in great bowls of shoes, old and clouted, that were made for a foot as big as two of hers.

The Doctor knew these two old women, who were often employed in such dismal offices.

"How does Mrs. Bligh? See me with half an eye? Hey — that's rhyme, isn't it? — And, Judy lass — why, I thought you lived nearer the town — here making poor Mr. Feltram's last toilet. You have helped to dress many a poor fellow for his last journey. Not a bad notion of drill either — they stand at attention stiff and straight enough in the sentry-box. Your recruits do you credit, Mrs. Wale."

The Doctor stood at the foot of the bed to inspect, breathing forth a vapour of very fine old port, his hands in his pockets, speaking with a lazy thickness, and looking so comfortable and facetious, that Mrs. Julaper would have liked to turn him out of the room.

But the Doctor was not unkind, only extremely comfortable. He was a goodnatured fellow, and had thought and care for the living, but not a great deal of sentiment for the dead, whom he had looked in the face too often to be much disturbed by the spectacle.

"You'll have to keep that bandage on. You should be sharp; you should know all about it, girl, by this time, and not let those muscles stiffen. I need not tell you the mouth shuts as easily as this snuff-box, if you only take it in time. — I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you'll send to Jos Fringer for the poor fellow's outfit. Fringer is a very proper man — there ain't a properer und-aker in England. I always re-mmend Fringer — in Church-street in Golden Friars. You know Fringer, I daresay."

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure. That will be as Sir Bale may please to direct," answered Mrs. Julaper.

"You've got him very straight — straighter than I thought you could; but the large joints were not so stiff. A very little longer wait, and you'd hardly have got him into his coffin. He'll want a vr-r-ry long one, poor lad. Short cake is life, ma'am. Sad thing this. They'll open their eyes, I promise you, down in the town. 'Twill be cool enough, I'd shay, affre all th-thunr-thunnle, you know. I think I'll take a nip, Mrs. Jool-fr, if you wouldn't mine makin' me out a thimble-ful bran-band-bran-rand-andy, eh, Mishs Joolfr?"

And the Doctor took a chair by the fire; and Mrs. Julaper, with a dubious conscience and dry hospitality, procured the brandy-flask and wine-glass, and helped the physician in a thin hesitating stream, which left him ample opportunity to cry "Hold — enough!" had he been so minded. But that able physician had no confidence, it would seem, in any dose under a bumper, which he sipped with commendation, and then fell asleep with the firelight on his face — to tender-hearted Mrs. Julaper's disgust — and snored with a sensual disregard of the solemnity of his situation; until with a profound nod, or rather dive, toward the fire, he awoke, got up and shook his ears with a kind of start, and standing with his back to the fire, asked for his muffler and horse; and so took his leave also of the weird sisters, who were still pottering about the body, with croak and whisper, and nod and ogle. He took his leave also of good Mrs. Julaper, who was completing arrangements with teapot and kettle, spiced elderberry wine, and other comforts, to support them through their proposed vigil. And finally, in a sort of way, he took his leave of the body, with a long businesslike stare, from the foot of the bed, with his short hands stuffed into his pockets. And so, to Mrs. Julaper's relief, this unseemly doctor, speaking thickly, departed.

And now, the Doctor being gone, and all things prepared for the 'wake' to be observed by withered Mrs. Bligh of the one eye, and yellow Mrs. Wale of the crooked back, the house grew gradually still. The thunder had by this time died into the solid boom of distant battle, and the fury of the gale had subsided to the long sobbing wail that is charged with so eerie a melancholy. Within all was stirless, and the two old women, each a 'Mrs.' by courtesy, who had not much to thank Nature or the world for, sad and cynical, and in a sort outcasts told off by fortune to these sad and grizzly services, sat themselves down by the fire, each perhaps feeling unusually at home in the other's society; and in this soured and forlorn comfort, trimming their fire, quickening the song of the kettle to a boil, and waxing polite and chatty; each treating the other with that deprecatory and formal courtesy which invites a return in kind, and both growing strangely happy in this little world of their own, in the unusual and momentary sense of an importance and consideration which were delightful.

The old still-room of Mardykes Hall is an oblong room wainscoted. From the door you look its full length to the wide stone-shafted Tudor window at the other end. At your left is the ponderous mantelpiece, supported by two spiral stone pillars; and close to the door at the right was the bed in which the two crones had just stretched poor Philip Feltram, who lay as still as an uncoloured waxwork, with a heavy pennypiece on each eye, and a bandage under his jaw, making his mouth look stern. And the two old ladies over their tea by the fire conversed agreeably, compared their rheumatisms and other ailments wordily, and talked of old times, and early recollections, and of sick-beds they had attended, and corpses that "you would not know, so pined and windered" were they; and others so fresh and canny, you'd say the dead had never looked so bonny in life.



Then they began to talk of people who grew tall in their coffins, of others who had been buried alive, and of others who walked after death. Stories as true as holy writ.

"Were you ever down by Hawarth, Mrs. Bligh — hard by Dalworth Moss?" asked crook-backed Mrs. Wale, holding her spoon suspended over her cup.

"Neea whaar sooa far south, Mrs. Wale, ma'am; but ma father was off times down thar cuttin' peat."

"Ah, then ye'll not a kenned farmer Dykes that lived by the Lin-tree Scaur. 'Tweer I that laid him out, poor aad fellow, and a dow man he was when aught went cross wi' him; and he cursed and swore, twad gar ye dodder to hear him. They said he was a hard man wi' some folk; but he kep a good house, and liked to see plenty, and many a time when I was swaimous about my food, he'd clap t' meat on ma plate, and mak' me eat ma fill. Na, na — there was good as well as bad in farmer Dykes. It was a year after he deed, and Tom Ettles was walking home, down by the Birken Stoop one night, and not a soul nigh, when he sees a big ball, as high as his knee, whirlin' and spangin' away before him on the road. What it wer he could not think; but he never consayted there was a freet or a bo thereaway; so he kep near it, watching every spang and turn it took, till it ran into the gripe by the roadside. There was a gravel pit just there, and Tom Ettles wished to take another gliff at it before he went on. But when he keeked into the pit, what should he see but a man attoppa a horse that could not get up or on; and says he, 'I think ye be at a dead-lift there, gaffer.' And wi' the word, up looks the man, and who sud it be but farmer Dykes himsel; and Tom Ettles saw him plain enough, and kenned the horse too for Black Captain, the farmer's aad beast, that broke his leg and was shot two years and more before the farmer died. 'Ay,' says farmer Dykes, lookin' very bad; 'forsett-and-backsett, ye'll tak me oot, Tom Ettles, and clap ye doun behint me quick, or I'll claw ho'd o' thee.' Tom felt his hair risin' stiff on his heed, and his tongue so fast to the roof o' his mouth he could scarce get oot a word; but says he, 'If Black Jack can't do it o' noo, he'll ne'er do't and carry double.' 'I ken my ain business best,' says Dykes. 'If ye gar me gie ye a look, 'twill gie ye the creepin's while ye live; so git ye doun, Tom;' and with that the doobby lifts its neaf, and Tom saw there was a red light round horse and man, like the glow of a peat fire. And says Tom, 'In the name o' God, ye'll let me pass;' and with the word the gooast draws itsel' doun, all a-creaked, like a man wi' a sudden pain; and Tom Ettles took to his heels more deed than alive."

They had approached their heads, and the story had sunk to that mysterious murmur that thrills the listener, when in the brief silence that followed they heard a low odd laugh near the door.

In that direction each lady looked aghast, and saw Feltram sitting straight up in the bed, with the white bandage in his hand, and as it seemed, for one foot was below the coverlet, near the floor, about to glide forth.

Mrs. Bligh, uttering a hideous shriek, clutched Mrs. Wale, and Mrs. Wale, with a scream as dreadful, gripped Mrs. Bligh; and quite forgetting their somewhat formal politeness, they reeled and tugged, wrestling towards the window, each struggling to place her companion between her and the 'dobby,' and both uniting in a direful peal of yells.

This was the uproar which had startled Sir Bale from his dream, and was now startling the servants from theirs.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *The Mist on the Mountain*

Doctor Torvey was sent for early next morning, and came full of wonder, learning and scepticism. Seeing is believing, however; and there was Philip Feltram living, and soon to be, in all bodily functions, just as usual.

"Upon my soul, Sir Bale, I couldn't have believed it, if I had not seen it with my eyes," said the Doctor impressively, while sipping a glass of sherry in the 'breakfast parlour,' as the great panelled and pictured room next the dining-room was called. "I don't think there is any similar case on record — no pulse, no more than the poker; no respiration, by Jove, no more than the chimneypiece; as cold as a lead image in the garden there. Well, you'll say all that might possibly be fallacious; but what will you say to the cadaveric stiffness? Old Judy Wale can tell you; and my friend Marcella — Monocula would be nearer the mark — Mrs. Bligh, she knows all those common, and I may say up to this, infallible, signs of death, as well as I do. There is no mystery about them; they'll depose to the literality of the symptoms. You heard how they gave tongue. Upon my honour, I'll send the whole case up to my old chief, Sir Hervey Hansard, to London. You'll hear what a noise it will make among the profession. There never was — and it ain't too much to say there never *will* be — another case like it."

During this lecture, and a great deal more, Sir Bale leaned back in his chair, with his legs extended, his heels on the ground, and his arms folded, looking sourly up in the face of a tall lady in white satin, in a ruff, and with a bird on her hand, who smiled down superciliously from her frame on the Baronet. Sir Bale seemed a little bit high and dry with the Doctor.

"You physicians are unquestionably," he said, "a very learned profession."

The Doctor bowed.

"But there's just one thing you know nothing about —"

"Eh? What's that?" inquired Doctor Torvey.

"Medicine," answered Sir Bale. "I was aware you never knew what was the matter with a sick man; but I didn't know, till now, that you couldn't tell when he was dead."

"Ha, ha! — well — ha, ha! — *yes* — well, you see, you — ha, ha! — you certainly have me there. But it's a case without a parallel — it is, upon my honour. You'll find it will not only be talked about, but written about; and, whatever papers appear upon it, will come to me; and I'll take care, Sir Bale, you shall have an opportunity of reading them."

"Of which I shan't avail myself," answered Sir Bale. "Take another glass of sherry, Doctor."

The Doctor made his acknowledgments and filled his glass, and looked through the wine between him and the window.

"Ha, ha! — see there, your port, Sir Bale, gives a fellow such habits — looking for the beeswing, by Jove. It isn't easy, in one sense at least, to get your port out of a fellow's head when once he has tasted it."

But if the honest Doctor meant a hint for a glass of that admirable bin, it fell pointless; and Sir Bale had no notion of making another libation of that precious fluid in honour of Doctor Torvey.

"And I take it for granted," said Sir Bale, "that Feltram will do very well; and, should anything go wrong, I can send for you — unless he should die again; and in that case I think I shall take my own opinion."

So he and the Doctor parted.

Sir Bale, although he did not consult the Doctor on his own case, was not particularly well. "That lonely place, those frightful mountains, and that damp black lake" — which features in the landscape he cursed all round — "are enough to give any man blue devils; and when a fellow's spirits go, he's all gone. That's why I'm dyspeptic — that and those d — d debts — and the post, with its flight of croaking and screeching letters from London. I wish there was no post here. I wish it was like Sir Amyrall's time, when they shot the York mercer that came to dun him, and no one ever took anyone to task about it; and now they can pelt you at any distance they please through the post; and fellows lose their spirits and their appetite and any sort of miserable comfort that is possible in this odious abyss."

Was there gout in Sir Bale's case, or 'vapours'? I know not what the faculty would have called it; but Sir Bale's mode of treatment was simply to work off the attack by long and laborious walking.

This evening his walk was upon the Fells of Golden Friars — long after the landscape below was in the eclipse of twilight, the broad bare sides and angles of these gigantic uplands were still lighted by the misty western sun.

There is no such sense of solitude as that which we experience upon the silent and vast elevations of great mountains. Lifted high above the level of human sounds and habitations, among the wild expanses and colossal features of Nature, we are thrilled in our loneliness with a strange fear and elation — an ascent above the reach of life's vexations or companionship, and the tremblings of a wild and undefined misgiving. The filmy disc of the moon had risen in the east, and was already faintly silvering the shadowy scenery below, while yet Sir Bale stood in the mellow light of the western sun, which still touched also the summits of the opposite peaks of Morvyn Fells.

Sir Bale Mardykes did not, as a stranger might, in prudence, hasten his descent from the heights at which he stood while yet a gleam of daylight remained to him. For he was, from his boyhood, familiar with those solitary regions; and, beside this, the thin circle of the moon, hung in the eastern sky, would brighten as the sunlight sank, and hang like a lamp above his steps.

There was in the bronzed and resolute face of the Baronet, lighted now in the parting beams of sunset, a resemblance to that of Charles the Second — not our "merry" ideal, but the more energetic and saturnine face which the portraits have preserved to us.

He stood with folded arms on the side of the slope, admiring, in spite of his prejudice, the unusual effects of a view so strangely lighted — the sunset tints on the opposite peaks, lost in the misty twilight, now deepening lower down into a darker shade, through which the outlines of the stone gables and tower of Golden Friars and the light of fire or candle in their windows were dimly visible.

As he stood and looked, his more distant sunset went down, and sudden twilight was upon him, and he began to remember the beautiful Homeric picture of a landscape coming out, rock and headland, in the moonlight.

There had hung upon the higher summits, at his right, a heavy fold of white cloud, which on a sudden broke, and, like the smoke of artillery, came rolling down the slopes toward him. Its principal volume, however, unfolded itself in a mighty flood down the side of the mountain towards the lake; and that which spread towards and soon enveloped the ground on which he stood was by no means so dense a fog. A thick mist enough it was; but still, to a distance of twenty or thirty yards, he could discern the outline of a rock or scaur, but not beyond it.

There are few sensations more intimidating than that of being thus enveloped on a lonely mountain-side, which, like this one, here and there breaks into precipice.

There is another sensation, too, which affects the imagination. Overtaken thus on the solitary expanse, there comes a new chill and tremour as this treacherous medium surrounds us, through which unperceived those shapes which fancy conjures up might approach so near and bar our path.

From the risk of being reduced to an actual standstill he knew he was exempt. The point from which the wind blew, light as it was, assured him of that. Still the mist was thick enough seriously to embarrass him. It had overtaken him as he was looking down upon the lake; and he now looked to his left, to try whether in that direction it was too thick to permit a view of the nearest landmarks. Through this white film he saw a figure standing only about five-and-twenty steps away, looking down, as it seemed, in precisely the same direction as he, quite motionless, and standing like a shadow projected upon the smoky vapour. It was the figure of a slight tall man, with his arm extended, as if pointing to a remote object, which no mortal eye certainly could discern through the mist. Sir Bale gazed at this figure, doubtful whether he were in a waking dream, unable to conjecture whence it had come; and as he looked, it moved, and was almost instantly out of sight.

He descended the mountain cautiously. The mist was now thinner, and through the haze he was beginning to see objects more distinctly, and, without danger, to proceed at a quicker pace. He had still a long walk by the uplands towards Mardykes Hall before he descended to the level of the lake.

The mist was still quite thick enough to circumscribe his view and to hide the general features of the landscape; and well was it, perhaps, for Sir Bale that his boyhood had familiarised him with the landmarks on the mountain-side.

He had made nearly four miles on his solitary homeward way, when, passing under a ledge of rock which bears the name of the Cat's Skaitch, he saw the same figure in the short cloak standing within some thirty or forty yards of him — the thin curtain of mist, through which the moonlight touched it, giving to it an airy and unsubstantial character.

Sir Bale came to a standstill. The man in the short cloak nodded and drew back, and was concealed by the angle of the rock.

Sir Bale was now irritated, as men are after a start, and shouting to the stranger to halt, he 'slapped' after him, as the northern phrase goes, at his best pace. But again he was gone, and nowhere could he see him, the mist favouring his evasion.

Looking down the fells that overhang Mardykes Hall, the mountain-side dips gradually into a glen, which, as it descends, becomes precipitous and wooded. A footpath through this ravine conducts the wayfarer to the level ground that borders the lake; and by this dark pass Sir Bale Mardykes strode, in comparatively clear air, along the rocky path dappled with moonlight.

As he emerged upon the lower ground he again encountered the same figure. It approached. It was Philip Feltram.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *A New Philip Feltram*

The Baronet had not seen Feltram since his strange escape from death. His last interview with him had been stern and threatening; Sir Bale dealing with appearances in the spirit of an incensed judge, Philip Feltram lamenting in the submission of a helpless despair.

Feltram was full in the moonlight now, standing erect, and smiling cynically on the Baronet.

There was that in the bearing and countenance of Feltram that disconcerted him more than the surprise of the sudden meeting.

He had determined to meet Feltram in a friendly way, whenever that not very comfortable interview became inevitable. But he was confused by the suddenness of Feltram's appearance; and the tone, cold and stern, in which he had last spoken to him came first, and he spoke in it after a brief silence.

"I fancied, Mr. Feltram, you were in your bed; I little expected to find you here. I think the Doctor gave very particular directions, and said that you were to remain perfectly quiet."

"But I know more than the Doctor," replied Feltram, still smiling unpleasantly.

"I think, sir, you would have been better in your bed," said Sir Bale loftily.

"Come, come, come, come!" exclaimed Philip Feltram contemptuously.

"It seems to me," said Sir Bale, a good deal astonished, "you rather forget yourself."

"Easier to forget oneself, Sir Bale, than to forgive others, at times," replied Philip Feltram in his unparalleled mood.

"That's the way fools knock themselves up," continued Sir Bale. "You've been walking ever so far — away to the Fells of Golden Friars. It was you whom I saw there. What d — d folly! What brought you there?"

"To observe you," he replied.

"And have you walked the whole way there and back again? How did you get there?"

"Pooh! how did I come — how did you come — how did the fog come? From the lake, I suppose. We all come up, and then down." So spoke Philip Feltram, with serene insolence.

"You are pleased to talk nonsense," said Sir Bale.

"Because I like it — with a *meaning*."

Sir Bale looked at him, not knowing whether to believe his eyes and ears. He did not know what to make of him.

"I had intended speaking to you in a conciliatory way; you seem to wish to make that impossible" — Philip Feltram's face wore its repulsive smile; — "and in fact I don't know what to make of you, unless you are ill; and ill you well may be. You can't have walked much less than twelve miles."

"Wonderful effort for me!" said Feltram with the same sneer.

"Rather surprising for a man so nearly drowned," answered Sir Bale Mardykes.

"A dip: you don't like the lake, sir; but I do. And so it is: as Antaeus touched the earth, so I the water, and rise refreshed."

"I think you'd better get in and refresh there. I meant to tell you that all the unpleasantness about that banknote is over."

"Is it?"

"Yes. It has been recovered by Mr. Creswell, who came here last night. I've got it, and you're not to blame," said Sir Bale.

"But some one *is* to blame," observed Mr. Feltram, smiling still.

"Well, *you* are not, and that ends it," said the Baronet peremptorily.

"Ends it? Really, how good! how very good!"

Sir Bale looked at him, for there was something ambiguous and even derisive in the tone of Feltram's voice.

But before he could quite make up his mind, Feltram spoke again.

"Everything is settled about you and me?"

"There is nothing to prevent your staying at Mardykes now," said Sir Bale graciously.

"I shall be with you for two years, and then I go on my travels," answered Feltram, with a saturnine and somewhat wild look around him.

"Is he going mad?" thought the Baronet.

"But before I go, I'm to put you in a way of paying off your mortgages. That is my business here."

Sir Bale looked at him sharply. But now there was not the unpleasant smile, but the darkened look of a man in secret pain.

"You shall know it all by and by."

And without more ceremony, and with a darkening face, Philip Feltram made his way under the boughs of the thick oaks that grew there, leaving on Sir Bale's mind an impression that he had been watching some one at a distance, and had gone in consequence of a signal.

In a few seconds he followed in the same direction, halloaing after Feltram; for he did not like the idea of his wandering about the country by moonlight, or possibly losing his life among the precipices, and bringing a new discredit upon his house. But no answer came; nor could he in that thick copse gain sight of him again.

When Sir Bale reached Mardykes Hall he summoned Mrs. Julaper, and had a long talk with her. But she could not say that there appeared anything amiss with Philip Feltram; only he seemed more reserved, and as if he was brooding over something he did not intend to tell.

"But, you know, Sir Bale, what happened might well make a thoughtful man of him. If he's ever to think of Death, it should be after looking him so hard in the face; and I'm not ashamed to say, I'm glad to see he has grace to take the lesson, and I hope his experiences may be sanctified to him, poor fellow! Amen."

"Very good song, and very well sung," said Sir Bale; "but it doesn't seem to me that he has been improved, Mrs. Julaper. He seems, on the contrary, in a queer temper and anything but a heavenly frame of mind; and I thought I'd ask you, because if he is ill — I mean feverish — it might account for his eccentricities, as well as make it necessary to send after him, and bring him home, and put him to bed. But I suppose it is as you say, — his adventure has upset him a little, and he'll sober in a day or two, and return to his old ways."

But this did not happen. A change, more comprehensive than at first appeared, had taken place, and a singular alteration was gradually established.

He grew thin, his eyes hollow, his face gradually forbidding.

His ways and temper were changed: he was a new man with Sir Bale; and the Baronet after a time, people said, began to grow afraid of him. And certainly Feltram had acquired an extraordinary influence over the Baronet, who a little while ago had regarded and treated him with so much contempt.

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Purse of Gold*

The Baronet was very slightly known in his county. He had led a reserved and inhospitable life. He was pressed upon by heavy debts; and being a proud man, held aloof from society and its doings. He wished people to understand that he was nursing his estate; but somehow the estate did not thrive at nurse. In the country other people's business is admirably well known; and the lord of Mardykes was conscious, perhaps, that his neighbours knew as well he did, that the utmost he could do was to pay the interest charged upon it, and to live in a frugal way enough.

The lake measures some four or five miles across, from the little jetty under the walls of Mardykes Hall to Cloostedd.

Philip Feltram, changed and morose, loved a solitary row upon the lake; and sometimes, with no one to aid him in its management, would take the little sailboat and pass the whole day upon those lonely waters.

Frequently he crossed to Cloostedd; and mooring the boat under the solemn trees that stand reflected in that dark mirror, he would disembark and wander among the lonely woodlands, as people thought, cherishing in those ancestral scenes the memory of ineffaceable injuries, and the wrath and revenge that seemed of late to darken his countenance, and to hold him always in a moody silence.

One autumnal evening Sir Bale Mardykes was sourly ruminating after his solitary meal. A very red sun was pouring its last low beams through the valley at the western extremity of the lake, across its elsewhere sombre waters, and touching with a sudden and blood-red tint the sail of the skiff in which Feltram was returning from his lonely cruise.

"Here comes my domestic water-fiend," sneered Sir Bale, as he lay back in his cumbrous armchair. "Cheerful place, pleasant people, delicious fate! The place alone has been enough to set that fool out of his little senses, d — n him!"

Sir Bale averted his eyes, and another subject not pleasanter entered his mind. He was thinking of the races that were coming off next week at Heckleston Downs, and what sums of money might be made there, and how hard it was that he should be excluded by fortune from that brilliant lottery.

"Ah, Mrs. Julaper, is that you?"

Mrs. Julaper, who was still at the door, curtsied, and said, "I came, Sir Bale, to see whether you'd please to like a jug of mulled claret, sir."

"Not I, my dear. I'll take a mug of beer and my pipe; that homely solace better befits a ruined gentleman."

"H'm, sir; you're not that, Sir Bale; you're no worse than half the lords and great men that are going. I would not hear another say that of you, sir."

"That's very kind of you, Mrs. Julaper; but you won't call *me* out for backbiting myself, especially as it is true, d — d true, Mrs. Julaper! Look ye; there never was a Mardykes here before but he could lay his hundred or his thousand pounds on the winner of the Heckleston Cup; and what could I bet? Little more than that mug of beer I spoke of. It was my great-grandfather who opened the course on the Downs of Heckleston, and now *I* can't show there! Well, what must I do? Grin and bear it, that's all. If you please, Mrs. Julaper, I will have that jug of claret you offered. I want spice and hot wine to keep me alive; but I'll smoke my pipe first, and in an hour's time it will do."

When Mrs. Julaper was gone, he lighted his pipe, and drew near the window, through which he looked upon the now fading sky and the twilight landscape.

He smoked his pipe out, and by that time it had grown nearly dark. He was still looking out upon the faint outlines of the view, and thinking angrily what a little bit of luck at the races would do for many a man who probably did not want it half so much as he. Vague and sombre as his thoughts were, they had, like the darkening landscape outside, shape enough to define their general character. Bitter and impious they were — as those of egotistic men naturally are in suffering. And after brooding, and muttering by fits and starts, he said:

"How many tens and hundreds of thousands of pounds will change hands at Heckleston next week; and not a shilling in all the change and shuffle will stick to me! How many a fellow would sell himself, like Dr. Faustus, just for the knowledge of the name of the winner! But he's no fool, and does not buy his own."

Something caught his eye; something moving on the wall. The fire was lighted, and cast a flickering and gigantic shadow upward; the figure of a man standing behind Sir Bale Mardykes, on whose shoulder he placed a lean hand. Sir Bale turned suddenly about, and saw Philip Feltram. He was looking dark and stern, and did not remove his hand from his shoulder as he peered into the Baronet's face with his deep-set mad eyes.

"Ha, Philip, upon my soul!" exclaimed Sir Bale, surprised. "How time flies! It seems only this minute since I saw the boat a mile and a half away from the shore. Well — yes; there has been time; it is dark now. Ha, ha! I assure you, you startled me. Won't you take something? Do. Shall I touch the bell?"

"You have been troubled about those mortgages. I told you I should pay them off, I thought."

Here there was a pause, and Sir Bale looked hard in Feltram's face. If he had been in his ordinary spirits, or perhaps in some of his haunts less solitary than Mardykes, he would have laughed; but here he had grown unlike himself, gloomy and credulous, and was, in fact, a nervous man.

Sir Bale smiled, and shook his head dismally.

"It is very kind of you, Feltram; the idea shows a kindly disposition. I know you would do me a kindness if you could."

As Sir Bale, each looking in the other's eyes, repeated in this sentence the words "kind," "kindly," "kindness," a smile lighted Feltram's face with at each word an intenser light; and Sir Bale grew sombre in its glare; and when he had done speaking, Feltram's face also on a sudden darkened.

"I have found a fortuneteller in Cloostedd Wood. Look here."

And he drew from his pocket a leathern purse, which he placed on the table in his hand; and Sir Bale heard the pleasant clink of coin in it.

"A fortuneteller! You don't mean to say she gave you that?" said Sir Bale.

Feltram smiled again, and nodded.

"It *was* the custom to give the fortuneteller a trifle. It is a great improvement making *her* fee you," observed Sir Bale, with an approach to his old manner.

"He put that in my hand with a message," said Feltram.

"He? O, then it was a male fortuneteller!"

"Gipsies go in gangs, men and women. *He* might lend, though *she* told fortunes," said Feltram.

"It's the first time I ever heard of gipsies lending money," and he eyed the purse with a whimsical smile.

With his lean fingers still holding it, Feltram sat down at the table. His face contracted as if in cunning thought, and his chin sank upon his breast as he leaned back.

"I think," continued Sir Bale, "ever since they were spoiled, the Egyptians have been a little shy of lending, and leave that branch of business to the Hebrews."

"What would you give to know, now, the winner at Heckleston races?" said Feltram suddenly, raising his eyes.

"Yes; that would be worth something," answered Sir Bale, looking at him with more interest than the incredulity he affected would quite warrant.

"And this money I have power to lend you, to make your game."

"Do you mean that really?" said Sir Bale, with a new energy in tone, manner, and features.

"That's heavy; there are some guineas there," said Feltram with a dark smile, raising the purse in his hand a little, and letting it drop upon the table with a clang.

"There is *something* there, at all events," said Sir Bale.

Feltram took the purse by the bottom, and poured out on the table a handsome pile of guineas.

"And do you mean to say you got all that from a gipsy in Cloostedd Wood?"

"A friend, who is — *myself*," answered Philip Feltram.

"Yourself! Then it is yours — *you* lend it?" said the Baronet, amazed; for there was no getting over the heap of guineas, and the wonder was pretty equal whence they had come.

"Myself, and not myself," said Feltram oracularly; "as like as voice and echo, man and shadow."

Had Feltram in some of his solitary wanderings and potterings lighted upon hidden treasure? There was a story of two Feltrams of Cloostedd, brothers, who had joined the king's army and fought at Marston Moor, having buried in Cloostedd Wood a great deal of gold and plate and jewels. They had, it was said, intrusted one tried servant with the secret; and that servant remained at home. But by a perverse fatality the three witnesses had perished within a month: the two brothers at Marston Moor; and the confidant, of fever, at Cloostedd. From that day forth treasure-seekers had from time to time explored the woods of Cloostedd; and many a tree of mark was dug beside, and the earth beneath many a stone and scar and other landmark in that solitary forest was opened by night, until hope gradually died out, and the tradition had long ceased to prompt to action, and had become a story and nothing more.

The image of the nursery-tale had now recurred to Sir Bale after so long a reach of years; and the only imaginable way, in his mind, of accounting for penniless Philip Feltram having all that gold in his possession was that, in some of his lonely wanderings, chance had led him to the undiscovered hoard of the two Feltrams who had died in the great civil wars.

"Perhaps those gipsies you speak of found the money where you found them; and in that case, as Cloostedd Forest, and all that is in it is my property, their sending it to me is more like my servant's handing me my hat and stick when I'm going out, than making me a present."

"You will not be wise to rely upon the law, Sir Bale, and to refuse the help that comes unasked. But if you like your mortgages as they are, keep them; and if you like my terms as they are, take them; and when you have made up your mind, let me know."

Philip Feltram dropped the heavy purse into his capacious coatpocket, and walked, muttering, out of the room.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *The Message from Cloostedd*

"Come back, Feltram; come back, Philip!" cried Sir Bale hastily. "Let us talk, can't we? Come and talk this odd business over a little; you must have mistaken what I meant; I should like to hear all about it."

"All is not much, sir," said Philip Feltram, entering the room again, the door of which he had half closed after him. "In the forest of Cloostedd I met to-day some people, one of whom can foretell events, and told me the names of the winners of the first three races at Heckleston, and gave me this purse, with leave to lend you so much money as you care to stake upon the races. I take no security; you shan't be troubled; and you'll never see the lender, unless you seek him out."

"Well, those are not bad terms," said Sir Bale, smiling wistfully at the purse, which Feltram had again placed upon the table.

"No, not bad," repeated Feltram, in the harsh low tone in which he now habitually spoke.

"You'll tell me what the prophet said about the winners; I should like to hear their names."

"The names I shall tell you if you walk out with me," said Feltram.

"Why not here?" asked Sir Bale.

"My memory does not serve me here so well. Some people, in some places, though they be silent, obstruct thought. Come, let us speak," said Philip Feltram, leading the way.

Sir Bale, with a shrug, followed him.

By this time it was dark. Feltram was walking slowly towards the margin of the lake; and Sir Bale, more curious as the delay increased, followed him, and smiled faintly as he looked after his tall, gaunt figure, as if, even in the dark, expressing a ridicule which he did not honestly feel, and the expression of which, even if there had been light, there was no one near enough to see.

When he reached the edge of the lake, Feltram stooped, and Sir Bale thought that his attitude was that of one who whispers to and caresses a reclining person. What he fancied was a dark figure lying horizontally in the shallow water, near the edge, turned out to be, as he drew near, no more than a shadow on the elsewhere lighter water; and with his change of position it had shifted and was gone, and Philip Feltram was but dabbling his hand this way and that in the water, and muttering faintly to himself. He rose as the Baronet drew near, and standing upright, said,

"I like to listen to the ripple of the water among the grass and pebbles; the tongue and lips of the lake are lapping and whispering all along. It is the merest poetry; but you are so romantic, you excuse me."

There was an angry curve in Feltram's eyebrows, and a cynical smile, and something in the tone which to the satirical Baronet was almost insulting. But even had he been less curious, I don't think he would have betrayed his mortification; for an odd and unavowed influence which he hated was gradually establishing in Feltram an ascendancy which sometimes vexed and sometimes cowed him.

"You are not to tell," said Feltram, drawing near him in the dusk. "The secret is yours when you promise."

"Of course I promise," said Sir Bale. "If I believed it, you don't think I could be such an ass as to tell it; and if I didn't believe it, I'd hardly take the trouble."

Feltram stooped, and dipping the hollow of his hand in the water, he raised it full, and said he, "Hold out your hand — the hollow of your hand — like this. I divide the water for a sign — share to me and share to you." And he turned his hand, so as to pour half the water into the hollow palm of Sir Bale, who was smiling, with some uneasiness mixed in his mockery.

"Now, you promise to keep all secrets respecting the teller and the finder, be that who it may?"

"Yes, I promise," said Sir Bale.

"Now do as I do," said Feltram. And he shed the water on the ground, and with his wet fingers touched his forehead and his breast; and then he joined his hand with Sir Bale's, and said, "Now you are my safe man."

Sir Bale laughed. "That's the game they call 'grand mufi,'" said he.

"Exactly; and means nothing," said Feltram, "except that some day it will serve you to remember by. And now the names. Don't speak; listen — you may break the thought else. The winner of the first is *Beeswing*; of the second, *Falcon*; and of the third, *Lightning*."

He had stood for some seconds in silence before he spoke; his eyes were closed; he seemed to bring up thought and speech with difficulty, and spoke faintly and drowsily, both his hands a little raised, and the fingers extended, with the groping air of a man who moves in the dark. In this odd way, slowly, faintly, with many a sigh and scarcely audible groan, he gradually delivered his message and was silent. He stood, it seemed, scarcely half awake, muttering indistinctly and sighing to himself. You would have said that he was exhausted and suffering, like a man at his last hour resigning himself to death.

At length he opened his eyes, looked round a little wildly and languidly, and with another great sigh sat down on a large rock that lies by the margin of the lake, and sighed heavily again and again. You might have fancied that he was a second time recovering from drowning.

Then he got up, and looked drowsily round again, and sighed like a man worn out with fatigue, and was silent.

Sir Bale did not care to speak until he seemed a little more likely to obtain an answer. When that time came, he said, "I wish, for the sake of my believing, that your list was a little less incredible. Not one of the horses you name is the least likely; not one of them has a chance."

"So much the better for you; you'll get what odds you please. You had better seize your luck; on Tuesday *Beeswing* runs," said Feltram. "When you want money for the purpose, I'm your banker — here is your bank."

He touched his breast, where he had placed the purse, and then he turned and walked swiftly away.

Sir Bale looked after him till he disappeared in the dark. He fluctuated among many surmises about Feltram. Was he insane, or was he practising an imposture? or was he fool enough to believe the predictions of some real gipsies? and had he borrowed



this money, which in Sir Bale's eyes seemed the greatest miracle in the matter, from those thriving shepherd mountaineers, the old Trebecks, who, he believed, were attached to him? Feltram had, he thought, borrowed it as if for himself; and having, as Sir Bale in his egotism supposed, "a sneaking regard" for him, had meant the loan for his patron, and conceived the idea of his using his revelations for the purpose of making his fortune. So, seeing no risk, and the temptation being strong, Sir Bale resolved to avail himself of the purse, and use his own judgment as to what horse to back.

About eleven o'clock Feltram, unannounced, walked, with his hat still on, into Sir Bale's library, and sat down at the opposite side of his table, looking gloomily into the Baronet's face for a time.

"Shall you want the purse?" he asked at last.

"Certainly; I always want a purse," said Sir Bale energetically.

"The condition is, that you shall back each of the three horses I have named. But you may back them for much or little, as you like, only the sum must not be less than five pounds in each hundred which this purse contains. That is the condition, and if you violate it, you will make some powerful people very angry, and you will feel it. Do you agree?"

"Of course; five pounds in the hundred — certainly; and how many hundreds are there?"

"Three."

"Well, a fellow with luck may win something with three hundred pounds, but it ain't very much."

"Quite enough, if you use it aright."

"Three hundred pounds," repeated the Baronet, as he emptied the purse, which Feltram had just placed in his hand, upon the table; and contemplating them with grave interest, he began telling them off in little heaps of five-and-twenty each. He might have thanked Feltram, but he was thinking more of the guineas than of the grizzly donor.

"Ay," said he, after a second counting, "I think there *are* exactly three hundred. Well, so you say I must apply three times five — fifteen of these. It is an awful pity backing those queer horses you have named; but if I must make the sacrifice, I must, I suppose?" he added, with a hesitating inquiry in the tone.

"If you don't, you'll rue it," said Feltram coldly, and walked away.

"Penny in pocket's a merry companion," says the old English proverb, and Sir Bale felt in better spirits and temper than he had for many a day as he replaced the guineas in the purse.

It was long since he had visited either the racecourse or any other place of amusement. Now he might face his kind without fear that his pride should be mortified, and dabble in the fascinating agitations of the turf once more.

"Who knows how this little venture may turn out?" he thought. "It is time the luck should turn. My last summer in Germany, my last winter in Paris — d — n me, I'm owed something. It's time I should win a bit."

Sir Bale had suffered the indolence of a solitary and discontented life imperceptibly to steal upon him. It would not do to appear for the first time on Heckleston Lea with any of those signs of negligence which, in his case, might easily be taken for poverty. All his appointments, therefore, were carefully looked after; and on the Monday following, he, followed by his groom, rode away for the Saracen's Head at Heckleston, where he was to put up, for the races that were to begin on the day following, and presented as handsome an appearance as a peer in those days need have cared to show.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *On the Course — Beeswing, Falcon, and Lightning*

As he rode towards Golden Friars, through which his route lay, in the early morning light, in which the mists of night were clearing, he looked back towards Mardykes with a hope of speedy deliverance from that hated imprisonment, and of a return to the continental life in which he took delight. He saw the summits and angles of the old building touched with the cheerful beams, and the grand old trees, and at the opposite side the fells dark, with their backs towards the east; and down the side of the wooded and precipitous clough of Feltram, the light, with a pleasant contrast against the beetling purple of the fells, was breaking in the faint distance. On the lake he saw the white speck that indicated the sail of Philip Feltram's boat, now midway between Mardykes and the wooded shores of Cloostedd.

"Going on the same errand," thought Sir Bale, "I should not wonder. I wish him the same luck. Yes, he's going to Cloostedd Forest. I hope he may meet his gipsies there — the Trebecks, or whoever they are."

And as a momentary sense of degradation in being thus beholden to such people smote him, "Well," thought he, "who knows? Many a fellow will make a handsome sum of a poorer purse than this at Heckleston. It will be a light matter paying them then."

Through Golden Friars he rode. Some of the spectators who did not like him, wondered audibly at the gallant show, hoped it was paid for, and conjectured that he had ridden out in search of a wife. On the whole, however, the appearance of their Baronet in a smarter style than usual was popular, and accepted as a change to the advantage of the town.

Next morning he was on the racecourse of Heckleston, renewing old acquaintance and making himself as agreeable as he could — an object, among some people, of curiosity and even interest. Leaving the carriage-sides, the hoods and bonnets, Sir Bale was soon among the betting men, deep in more serious business.

How did he make his book? He did not break his word. He backed Beeswing, Falcon, and Lightning. But it must be owned not for a shilling more than the five guineas each, to which he stood pledged. The odds were forty-five to one against Beeswing, sixty to one against Lightning, and fifty to one against Falcon.

"A pretty lot to choose!" exclaimed Sir Bale, with vexation. "As if I had money so often, that I should throw it away!"

The Baronet was testy thinking over all this, and looked on Feltram's message as an impertinence and the money as his own.

Let us now see how Sir Bale Mardykes' pocket fared.

Sulkily enough at the close of the week he turned his back on Heckleston racecourse, and took the road to Golden Friars.

He was in a rage with his luck, and by no means satisfied with himself; and yet he had won something. The result of the racing had been curious. In the three principal races the favourites had been beaten: one by an accident, another on a technical point, and the third by fair running. And what horses had won? The names were precisely those which the "fortuneteller" had predicted.

Well, then, how was Sir Bale in pocket as he rode up to his ancestral house of Mardykes, where a few thousand pounds would have been very welcome? He had won exactly 775 guineas; and had he staked a hundred instead of five on each of the names communicated by Feltram, he would have won 15,500 guineas.

He dismounted before his hall-door, therefore, with the discontent of a man who had lost nearly 15,000 pounds. Feltram was upon the steps, and laughed dryly.

"What do you laugh at?" asked Sir Bale tartly.

"You've won, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've won; I've won a trifle."

"On the horses I named?"

"Well, yes; it so turned out, by the merest accident."

Feltram laughed again dryly, and turned away.

Sir Bale entered Mardykes Hall, and was surly. He was in a much worse mood than before he had ridden to Heckleston. But after a week or so ruminating upon the occurrence, he wondered that Feltram spoke no more of it. It was undoubtedly wonderful. There had been no hint of repayment yet, and he had made some hundreds by the loan; and, contrary to all likelihood, the three horses named by the unknown soothsayer had won. Who was this gipsy? It would be worth bringing the soothsayer to Mardykes, and giving his people a camp on the warren, and all the poultry they could catch, and a pig or a sheep every now and then. Why, that seer was worth the philosopher's stone, and could make Sir Bale's fortune in a season. Some one else would be sure to pick him up if he did not.

So, tired of waiting for Feltram to begin, he opened the subject one day himself. He had not seen him for two or three days; and in the wood of Mardykes he saw his lank figure standing among the thick trees, upon a little knoll, leaning on a staff which he sometimes carried with him in his excursions up the mountains.

"Feltram!" shouted Sir Bale.

Feltram turned and beckoned. Sir Bale muttered, but obeyed the signal.

"I brought you here, because you can from this point with unusual clearness today see the opening of the Clough of Feltram at the other side, and the clump of trees, where you will find the way to reach the person about whom you are always thinking."

"Who said I am always thinking about him?" said the Baronet angrily; for he felt like a man detected in a weakness, and resented it.

"I say it, because I *know* it; and *you* know it also. See that clump of trees standing solitary in the hollow? Among them, to the left, grows an ancient oak. Cut in its bark are two enormous letters H — F; so large and bold, that the rugged furrows of the oak bark fail to obscure them, although they are ancient and spread by time. Standing against the trunk of this great tree, with your

back to these letters, you are looking up the Glen or Clough of Feltram, that opens northward, where stands Cloostedd Forest spreading far and thick. Now, how do you find our fortuneteller?"

"That is exactly what I wish to know," answered Sir Bale; "because, although I can't, of course, believe that he's a witch, yet he has either made the most marvellous fluke I've heard of, or else he has got extraordinary sources of information; or perhaps he acts partly on chance, partly on facts. Be it which you please, I say he's a marvellous fellow; and I should like to see him, and have a talk with him; and perhaps he could arrange with me. I should be very glad to make an arrangement with him to give me the benefit of his advice about any matter of the same kind again."

"I think he's willing to see you; but he's a fellow with a queer fancy and a pig-head. He'll not come here; you must go to him; and approach him his own way too, or you may fail to find him. On these terms he invites you."

Sir Bale laughed.

"He knows his value, and means to make his own terms."

"Well, there's nothing unfair in that; and I don't see that I should dispute it. How is one to find him?"

"Stand, as I told you, with your back to those letters cut in the oak. Right before you lies an old Druidic altar-stone. Cast your eye over its surface, and on some part of it you are sure to see a black stain about the size of a man's head. Standing, as I suppose you, against the oak, that stain, which changes its place from day to day, will give you the line you must follow through the forest in order to light upon him. Take carefully from it such trees or objects as will guide you; and when the forest thickens, do the best you can to keep to the same line. You are sure to find him."

"You'll come, Feltram. I should lose myself in that wilderness, and probably fail to discover him," said Sir Bale; "and I really wish to see him."

"When two people wish to meet, it is hard if they don't. I can go with you a bit of the way; I can walk a little through the forest by your side, until I see the small flower that grows peeping here and there, that always springs where those people walk; and when I begin to see that sign, I must leave you. And, first, I'll take you across the lake."

"By Jove, you'll do no such thing!" said Sir Bale hastily.

"But that is the way he chooses to be approached," said Philip Feltram.

"I have a sort of feeling about that lake; it's the one childish spot that is left in my imagination. The nursery is to blame for it — old stories and warnings; and I can't think of that. I should feel I had invoked an evil omen if I did. I know it is all nonsense; but we are queer creatures, Feltram. I must only ride there."

"Why, it is five-and-twenty miles round the lake to that; and after all were done, he would not see you. He knows what he's worth, and he'll have his own way," answered Feltram. "The sun will soon set. See that withered branch, near Snakes Island, that looks like fingers rising from the water? When its points grow tipped with red, the sun has but three minutes to live."

"That is a wonder which I can't see; it is too far away."

"Yes, the lake has many signs; but it needs sight to see them," said Feltram.

"So it does," said the Baronet; "more than most men have got. I'll ride round, I say; and I make my visit, for this time, my own way."

"You'll not find him, then; and he wants his money. It would be a pity to vex him."

"It was to you he lent the money," said Sir Bale.

"Yes."

"Well, you are the proper person to find him out and pay him," urged Sir Bale.

"Perhaps so; but he invites you; and if you don't go, he may be offended, and you may hear no more from him."

"We'll try. When can you go? There are races to come off next week, for once and away, at Langton. I should not mind trying my luck there. What do you say?"

"You can go there and pay him, and ask the same question — what horses, I mean, are to win. All the county are to be there; and plenty of money will change hands."

"I'll try," said Feltram.

"When will you go?"

"Tomorrow," he answered.

"I have an odd idea, Feltram, that you are really going to pay off those cursed mortgages."

He laid his hand with at least a gesture of kindness on the thin arm of Feltram, who coldly answered,

"So have I;" and walked down the side of the little knoll and away, without another word or look.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *On the Lake, at Last*

Next day Philip Feltram crossed the lake; and Sir Bale, seeing the boat on the water, guessed its destination, and watched its progress with no little interest, until he saw it moored and its sail drop at the rude pier that affords a landing at the Clough of Feltram. He was now satisfied that Philip had actually gone to seek out the ‘cunning man,’ and gather hints for the next race.

When that evening Feltram returned, and, later still, entered Sir Bale’s library, the master of Mardykes was gladder to see his face and more interested about his news than he would have cared to confess.

Philip Feltram did not affect unconsciousness of that anxiety, but, with great directness, proceeded to satisfy it.

“I was in Cloostedd Forest to-day, nearly all day — and found the old gentleman in a wax. He did not ask me to drink, nor show me any kindness. He was huffed because you would not take the trouble to cross the lake to speak to him yourself. He took the money you sent him and counted it over, and dropped it into his pocket; and he called you hard names enough and to spare; but I brought him round, and at last he did talk.”

“And what did he say?”

“He said that the estate of Mardykes would belong to a Feltram.”

“He might have said something more likely,” said Sir Bale sourly. “Did he say anything more?”

“Yes. He said the winner at Langton Lea would be Silver Bell.”

“Any other name?”

“No.”

“Silver Bell? Well, that’s not so odd as the last. Silver Bell stands high in the list. He has a good many backers — long odds in his favour against most of the field. I should not mind backing Silver Bell.”

The fact is, that he had no idea of backing any other horse from the moment he heard the soothsayer’s prediction. He made up his mind to no half measures this time. He would go in to win something handsome.

He was in great force and full of confidence on the racecourse. He had no fears for the result. He bet heavily. There was a good margin still untouched of the Mardykes estate; and Sir Bale was a good old name in the county. He found a ready market for his offers, and had soon staked — such is the growing frenzy of that excitement — about twenty thousand pounds on his favourite, and stood to win seven.

He did not win, however. He lost his twenty thousand pounds.

And now the Mardykes estate was in imminent danger. Sir Bale returned, having distributed I O Us and promissory notes in all directions about him — quite at his wit’s end.

Feltram was standing — as on the occasion of his former happier return — on the steps of Mardykes Hall, in the evening sun, throwing eastward a long shadow that was lost in the lake. He received him, as before, with a laugh.

Sir Bale was too much broken to resent this laugh as furiously as he might, had he been a degree less desperate.

He looked at Feltram savagely, and dismounted.

“Last time you would not trust him, and this time he would not trust you. He’s huffed, and played you false.”

“It was not he. I should have backed that d — d horse in any case,” said Sir Bale, grinding his teeth. “What a witch you have discovered! One thing is true, perhaps. If there was a Feltram rich enough, he might have the estate now; but there ain’t. They are all beggars. So much for your conjurer.”

“He may make amends to you, if you make amends to him.”

“He! Why, what can that wretched impostor do? D — n me, I’m past helping now.”

“Don’t you talk so,” said Feltram. “Be civil. You must please the old gentleman. He’ll make it up. He’s placable when it suits him. Why not go to him his own way? I hear you are nearly ruined. You must go and make it up.”

“Make it up! With whom? With a fellow who can’t make even a guess at what’s coming? Why should I trouble my head about him more?”

“No man, young or old, likes to be frumped. Why did you cross his fancy? He won’t see you unless you go to him as he chooses.”

“If he waits for that, he may wait till doomsday. I don’t choose to go on that water — and cross it I won’t,” said Sir Bale.

But when his distracting reminders began to pour in upon him, and the idea of dismembering what remained of his property came home to him, his resolution faltered.

“I say, Feltram, what difference can it possibly make to him if I choose to ride round to Cloostedd Forest instead of crossing the lake in a boat?”

Feltram smiled darkly, and answered.

“I can’t tell. Can you?”

“Of course I can’t — I say I can’t; besides, what audacity of a fellow like that presuming to prescribe to me! Utterly ludicrous! And he can’t predict — do you really think or believe, Feltram, that he can?”

“I know he can. I know he misled you on purpose. He likes to punish those who don’t respect his will; and there is a reason in it, often quite clear — not ill-natured. Now you see he compels you to seek him out, and when you do, I think he’ll help you through your trouble. He said he would.”

“Then you have seen him since?”

“Yesterday. He has put a pressure on you; but he means to help you.”

“If he means to help me, let him remember I want a banker more than a seer. Let him give me a lift, as he did before. He must lend me money.”

“He’ll not stick at that. When he takes up a man, he carries him through.”

“The races of Byermere — I might retrieve at them. But they don’t come off for a month nearly; and what is a man like me to do in the meantime?”

“Every man should know his own business best. I’m not like you,” said Feltram grimly.

Now Sir Bale’s trouble increased, for some people were pressing. Something like panic supervened; for it happened that land was bringing just then a bad price, and more must be sold in consequence.

“All I can tell them is, I am selling land. It can’t be done in an hour. I’m selling enough to pay them all twice over. Gentlemen used to be able to wait till a man sold his acres for payment. D — n them! do they want my body, that they can’t let me alone for five minutes?”

The end of it was, that before a week Sir Bale told Feltram that he would go by boat, since that fellow insisted on it; and he did not very much care if he were drowned.

It was a beautiful autumnal day. Everything was bright in that mellowed sun, and the deep blue of the lake was tremulous with golden ripples; and crag and peak and scattered wood, faint in the distance, came out with a filmy distinctness on the fells in that pleasant light.

Sir Bale had been ill, and sent down the night before for Doctor Torvey. He was away with a patient. Now, in the morning, he had arrived inopportunely. He met Sir Bale as he issued from the house, and had a word with him in the court, for he would not turn back.

“Well,” said the Doctor, after his brief inspection, “you ought to be in your bed; that’s all I can say. You are perfectly mad to think of knocking about like this. Your pulse is at a hundred and ten; and, if you go across the lake and walk about Cloostedd, you’ll be raving before you come back.”

Sir Bale told him, apologetically, as if his life were more to his doctor than to himself, that he would take care not to fatigue himself, and that the air would do him good, and that in any case he could not avoid going; and so they parted.

Sir Bale took his seat beside Feltram in the boat, the sail was spread, and, bending to the light breeze that blew from Golden Friars, she glided from the jetty under Mardykes Hall, and the eventful voyage had begun.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Mystagogus*

The sail was loosed, the boat touched the stone step, and Feltram sprang out and made her fast to the old iron ring. The Baronet followed. So! he had ventured upon that water without being drowned. He looked round him as if in a dream. He had not been there since his childhood. There were no regrets, no sentiment, no remorse; only an odd return of the associations and fresh feelings of boyhood, and a long reach of time suddenly annihilated.

The little hollow in which he stood; the three hawthorn trees at his right; every crease and undulation of the sward, every angle and crack in the lichen-covered rock at his feet, recurred with a sharp and instantaneous recognition to his memory.

"Many a time your brother and I fished for hours together from that bank there, just where the bramble grows. That bramble has not grown an inch ever since, not a leaf altered; we used to pick blackberries off it, with our rods stuck in the bank — it was later in the year than now — till we stript it quite bare after a day or two. The steward used to come over — they were marking timber for cutting and we used to stay here while they rambled through the wood, with an axe marking the trees that were to come down. I wonder whether the big old boat is still anywhere. I suppose she was broken up, or left to rot; I have not seen her since we came home. It was in the wood that lies at the right — the other wood is called the forest; they say in old times it was eight miles long, northward up the shore of the lake, and full of deer; with a forester, and a reeve, and a verderer, and all that. Your brother was older than you; he went to India, or the Colonies; is he living still?"

"I care not."

"That's goodnatured, at all events; but do you know?"

"Not I; and what matter? If he's living, I warrant he has his share of the curse, the sweat of his brow and his bitter crust; and if he is dead, he's dust or worse, he's rotten, and smells accordingly."

Sir Bale looked at him; for this was the brother over whom, only a year or two ago, Philip used to cry tears of pathetic longing. Feltram looked darkly in his face, and sneered with a cold laugh.

"I suppose you mean to jest?" said Sir Bale.

"Not I; it is the truth. It is what you'd say, if you were honest. If he's alive, let him keep where he is; and if he's dead, I'll have none of him, body or soul. Do you hear that sound?"

"Like the wind moaning in the forest?"

"Yes."

"But I feel no wind. There's hardly a leaf stirring."

"I think so," said Feltram. "Come along."

And he began striding up the gentle slope of the glen, with many a rock peeping through its sward, and tufted ferns and furze, giving a wild and neglected character to the scene; the background of which, where the glen loses itself in a distant turn, is formed by its craggy and wooded side.

Up they marched, side by side, in silence, towards that irregular clump of trees, to which Feltram had pointed from the Mardykes side.

As they approached, it showed more scattered, and two or three of the trees were of grander dimensions than in the distance they had appeared; and as they walked, the broad valley of Cloostedd Forest opened grandly on their left, studding the sides of the valley with solitary trees or groups, which thickened as it descended to the broad level, in parts nearly three miles wide, on which stands the noble forest of Cloostedd, now majestically reposing in the stirless air, gilded and flushed with the melancholy tints of autumn.

I am now going to relate wonderful things; but they rest on the report, strangely consistent, it is true, of Sir Bale Mardykes. That all his senses, however, were sick and feverish, and his brain not quite to be relied on at that moment, is a fact of which sceptics have a right to make all they please and can.

Startled at their approach, a bird like a huge mackaw bounced from the boughs of the trees, and sped away, every now and then upon the ground, toward the shelter of the forest, fluttering and hopping close by the side of the little brook which, emerging from the forest, winds into the glen, and beside the course of which Sir Bale and Philip Feltram had ascended from the margin of the lake.

It fluttered on, as if one of its wings were hurt, and kept hopping and bobbing and flying along the grass at its swiftest, screaming all the time discordantly.

"That must be old Mrs. Amersald's bird, that got away a week ago," said Sir Bale, stopping and looking after it. "Was not it a mackaw?"

"No," said Feltram; "that was a gray parrot; but there are stranger birds in Cloostedd Forest, for my ancestors collected all that would live in our climate, and were at pains to find them the food and shelter they were accustomed to until they grew hardy — that is how it happens."

"By Jove, that's a secret worth knowing," said Sir Bale. "That would make quite a feature. What a fat brute that bird was! and green and dusky-crimson and yellow; but its head is white — age, I suspect; and what a broken beak — hideous bird! splendid plumage; something between a mackaw and a vulture."

Sir Bale spoke jocularly, but with the interest of a bird-fancier; a taste which, when young, he had indulged; and for the moment forgot his cares and the object of his unwonted excursion.

A moment after, a lank slim bird, perfectly white, started from the same boughs, and winged its way to the forest.

"A kite, I think; but its body is a little too long, isn't it?" said Sir Bale again, stopping and looking after its flight also.

"A foreign kite, I daresay?" said Feltram.

All this time there was hopping near them a jay, with the tameness of a bird accustomed to these solitudes. It peered over its slender wing curiously at the visitors; pecking here and nodding there; and thus hopping, it made a circle round them more than once. Then it fluttered up, and perched on a bough of the old oak, from the deep labyrinth of whose branches the other birds had emerged; and from thence it flew down and lighted on the broad druidic stone, that stood like a cyclopean table on its sunken stone props, before the snakelike roots of the oak.

Across this it hopped conceitedly, as over a stage on which it figured becomingly; and after a momentary hesitation, with a little spring, it rose and winged its way in the same direction which the other birds had taken, and was quickly lost in thick forest to the left.

"Here," said Feltram, "this is the tree."

"I remember it well! A gigantic trunk; and, yes, those marks; but I never before read them as letters. Yes, H.F., so they are — very odd I should not have remarked them. They are so large, and so strangely drawn-out in some places, and filled-in in others, and distorted, and the moss has grown about them; I don't wonder I took them for natural cracks and chasms in the bark," said Sir Bale.

"Very like," said Feltram.

Sir Bale had remarked, ever since they had begun their walk from the shore, that Feltram seemed to undergo a gloomy change. Sharper, grimmer, wilder grew his features, and shadow after shadow darkened his face wickedly.

The solitude and grandeur of the forest, and the repulsive gloom of his companion's countenance and demeanour, communicated a tone of anxiety to Sir Bale; and they stood still, side by side, in total silence for a time, looking toward the forest glades; between themselves and which, on the level sward of the valley, stood many a noble tree and fantastic group of forked birch and thorn, in the irregular formations into which Nature had thrown them.

"Now you stand between the letters. Cast your eyes on the stone," said Feltram suddenly, and his low stern tones almost startled the Baronet.

Looking round, he perceived that he had so placed himself that his point of vision was exactly from between the two great letters, now halfobliterated, which he had been scrutinizing just as he turned about to look toward the forest of Cloostedd.

"Yes, so I am," said Sir Bale.

There was within him an excitement and misgiving, akin to the sensation of a man going into battle, and which corresponded with the pale and sombre frown which Feltram wore, and the manifest change which had come over him.

"Look on the stone steadily for a time, and tell me if you see a black mark, about the size of your hand, anywhere upon its surface," said Feltram.

Sir Bale affected no airs of scepticism now; his imagination was stirred, and a sense of some unknown reality at the bottom of that which he had affected to treat before as illusion, inspired a strange interest in the experiment.

"Do you see it?" asked Feltram.

Sir Bale was watching patiently, but he had observed nothing of the kind.

Sharper, darker, more eager grew the face of Philip Feltram, as his eyes traversed the surface of that huge horizontal block.

"Now?" asked Feltram again.

No, he had seen nothing.

Feltram was growing manifestly uneasy, angry almost; he walked away a little, and back again, and then two or three times round the tree, with his hands shut, and treading the ground like a man trying to warm his feet, and so impatiently he returned, and looked again on the stone.

Sir Bale was still looking, and very soon said, drawing his brows together and looking hard,

"Ha! — yes — hush. There it is, by Jove! — wait — yes — there; it is growing quite plain."

It seemed not as if a shadow fell upon the stone, but rather as if the stone became semi-transparent, and just under its surface was something dark — a hand, he thought it — and darker and darker it grew, as if coming up toward the surface, and after some little wavering, it fixed itself movelessly, pointing, as he thought, toward the forest.

"It looks like a hand," said he. "By Jove, it is a hand — pointing towards the forest with a finger."

"Don't mind the finger; look only on that black blurred mark, and from the point where you stand, taking that point for your direction, look to the forest. Take some tree or other landmark for an object, enter the forest there, and pursue the same line, as well as you can, until you find little flowers with leaves like wood-sorrel, and with tall stems and a red blossom, not larger than a drop, such as you have not seen before, growing among the trees, and follow wherever they seem to grow thickest, and there you will find him."

All the time that Feltram was making this little address, Sir Bale was endeavouring to fix his route by such indications as Feltram described; and when he had succeeded in quite establishing the form of a peculiar tree — a melancholy ash, one huge limb of which had been blasted by lightning, and its partly stricken arm stood high and barkless, stretching its white fingers, as it were, in invitation into the forest, and signing the way for him —

"I have it now," said he. "Come Feltram, you'll come a bit of the way with me."

Feltram made no answer, but slowly shook his head, and turned and walked away, leaving Sir Bale to undertake his adventure alone.

The strange sound they had heard from the midst of the forest, like the rumble of a storm or the far-off trembling of a furnace, had quite ceased. Not a bird was hopping on the grass, or visible on bough or in the sky. Not a living creature was in sight — never was stillness more complete, or silence more oppressive.

It would have been ridiculous to give way to the old reluctance which struggled within him. Feltram had strode down the slope, and was concealed by a screen of bushes from his view. So alone, and full of an interest quite new to him, he set out in quest of his adventures.

## CHAPTER XX

### *The Haunted Forest*

Sir Bale Mardykes walked in a straight line, by bush and scaur, over the undulating ground, to the blighted ash-tree; and as he approached it, its withered bough stretched more gigantically into the air, and the forest seemed to open where it pointed.

He passed it by, and in a few minutes had lost sight of it again, and was striding onward under the shadow of the forest, which already enclosed him. He was directing his march with all the care he could, in exactly that line which, according to Feltram's rule, had been laid down for him. Now and then, having, as soldiers say, taken an object, and fixed it well in his memory, he would pause and look about him.

As a boy he had never entered the wood so far; for he was under a prohibition, lest he should lose himself in its intricacies, and be benighted there. He had often heard that it was haunted ground, and that too would, when a boy, have deterred him. It was on this account that the scene was so new to him, and that he cared so often to stop and look about him. Here and there a vista opened, exhibiting the same utter desertion, and opening farther perspectives through the tall stems of the trees faintly visible in the solemn shadow. No flowers could he see, but once or twice a wood anemone, and now and then a tiny grove of wood-sorrel.

Huge oak-trees now began to mingle and show themselves more and more frequently among the other timber; and gradually the forest became a great oak wood unintruded upon by any less noble tree. Vast trunks curving outwards to the roots, and expanding again at the branches, stood like enormous columns, striking out their groining boughs, with the dark vaulting of a crypt.

As he walked under the shadow of these noble trees, suddenly his eye was struck by a strange little flower, nodding quite alone by the knotted root of one of those huge oaks.

He stooped and picked it up, and as he plucked it, with a harsh scream just over his head, a large bird with heavy beating wings broke away from the midst of the branches. He could not see it, but he fancied the scream was like that of the huge mackaw whose ill-poised flight he had watched. This conjecture was but founded on the odd cry he had heard.

The flower was a curious one — a stem fine as a hair supported a little bell, that looked like a drop of blood, and never ceased trembling. He walked on, holding this in his fingers; and soon he saw another of the same odd type, then another at a shorter distance, then one a little to the right and another to the left, and farther on a little group, and at last the dark slope was all over trembling with these little bells, thicker and thicker as he descended a gentle declivity to the bank of the little brook, which flowing through the forest loses itself in the lake. The low murmur of this forest stream was almost the first sound, except the shriek of the bird that startled him a little time ago, which had disturbed the profound silence of the wood since he entered it. Mingling with the faint sound of the brook, he now heard a harsh human voice calling words at intervals, the purport of which he could not yet catch; and walking on, he saw seated upon the grass, a strange figure, corpulent, with a great hanging nose, the whole face glowing like copper. He was dressed in a bottle-green cut-velvet coat, of the style of Queen Anne's reign, with a dusky crimson waistcoat, both overlaid with broad and tarnished gold lace, and his silk stockings on thick swollen legs, with great buckled shoes, straddling on the grass, were rolled up over his knees to his short breeches. This ill-favoured old fellow, with a powdered wig that came down to his shoulders, had a dice-box in each hand, and was apparently playing his left against his right, and calling the throws with a hoarse cawing voice.

Raising his black piggish eyes, he roared to Sir Bale, by name, to come and sit down, raising one of his dice-boxes, and then indicating a place on the grass opposite to him.

Now Sir Bale instantly guessed that this was the man, gipsy, warlock, call him what he might, of whom he had come in search. With a strange feeling of curiosity, disgust, and awe, he drew near. He was resolved to do whatever this old man required of him, and to keep him, this time, in good humour.

Sir Bale did as he bid him, and sat down; and taking the box he presented, they began throwing turn about, with three dice, the copper-faced old man teaching him the value of the throws, as he proceeded, with many a curse and oath; and when he did not like a throw, grinning with a look of such real fury, that the master of Mardykes almost expected him to whip out his sword and prick him through as he sat before him.

After some time spent at this play, in which guineas passed now this way, now that, chucked across the intervening patch of grass, or rather moss, that served them for a green cloth, the old man roared over his shoulder,

"Drink;" and picking up a longstemmed conical glass which Sir Bale had not observed before, he handed it over to the Baronet; and taking another in his fingers, he held it up, while a very tall slim old man, dressed in a white livery, with powdered hair and cadaverous face, which seemed to run out nearly all into a long thin hooked nose, advanced with a flask in each hand. Looking at the unwieldy old man, with his heavy nose, powdered head, and all the bottle-green, crimson, and gold about him, and the long slim serving man, with sharp beak, and white from head to heel, standing by him, Sir Bale was forcibly reminded of the great old macaw and the long and slender kite, whose colours they, after their fashion, reproduced, with something, also indescribable, of the air and character of the birds. Not standing on ceremony, the old fellow held up his own glass first, which the white lackey filled from the flask, and then he filled Sir Bale's glass.

It was a large glass, and might have held about half a pint; and the liquor with which the servant filled it was something of the colour of an opal, and circles of purple and gold seemed to be spreading continually outward from the centre, and running inward from the rim, and crossing one another, so as to form a beautiful rippling network.

"I drink to your better luck next time," said the old man, lifting his glass high, and winking with one eye, and leering knowingly with the other; "and you know what I mean."

Sir Bale put the liquor to his lips. Wine? Whatever it was, never had he tasted so delicious a flavour. He drained it to the bottom, and placing it on the grass beside him, and looking again at the old dicer, who was also setting down his glass, he saw,



for the first time, the graceful figure of a young woman seated on the grass. She was dressed in deep mourning, had a black hood carelessly over her head, and, strangely, wore a black mask, such as are used at masquerades. So much of her throat and chin as he could see were beautifully white; and there was a prettiness in her air and figure which made him think what a beautiful creature she in all likelihood was. She was reclining slightly against the burly man in bottle-green and gold, and her arm was round his neck, and her slender white hand showed itself over his shoulder.

"Ho! my little Geaiette," cried the old fellow hoarsely; "it will be time that you and I should get home. — So, Bale Mardykes, I have nothing to object to you this time; you've crossed the lake, and you've played with me and won and lost, and drank your glass like a jolly companion, and now we know one another; and an acquaintance is made that will last. I'll let you go, and you'll come when I call for you. And now you'll want to know what horse will win next month at Rindermere races. — Whisper me, lass, and I'll tell him."

So her lips, under the black curtain, crept close to his ear, and she whispered.

"Ay, so it will," roared the old man, gnashing his teeth; "it will be Rainbow, and now make your best speed out of the forest, or I'll set my black dogs after you, ho, ho, ho! and they may chance to pull you down. Away!"

He cried this last order with a glare so black, and so savage a shake of his huge fist, that Sir Bale, merely making his general bow to the group, clapped his hat on his head, and hastily began his retreat; but the same discordant voice yelled after him:

"You'll want that, you fool; pick it up." And there came hurtling after and beside him a great leather bag, stained, and stuffed with a heavy burden, and bounding by him it stopped with a little wheel that brought it exactly before his feet.

He picked it up, and found it heavy.

Turning about to make his acknowledgments, he saw the two persons in full retreat; the profane old scoundrel in the bottle-green limping and stumbling, yet bowling along at a wonderful rate, with many a jerk and reel, and the slender lady in black gliding away by his side into the inner depths of the forest.

So Sir Bale, with a strange chill, and again in utter solitude, pursued his retreat, with his burden, at a swifter pace, and after an hour or so, had recovered the point where he had entered the forest, and passing by the druidic stone and the mighty oak, saw down the glen at his right, standing by the edge of the lake, Philip Feltram, close to the bow of the boat.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *Rindermere*

Feltram looked grim and agitated when Sir Bale came up to him, as he stood on the flat-stone by which the boat was moored.

"You found him?" said he.

"Yes."

"The lady in black was there?"

"She was."

"And you played with him?"

"Yes."

"And what is that in your hand?"

"A bag of something, I fancy money; it is heavy; he threw it after me. We shall see just now; let us get away."

"He gave you some of his wine to drink?" said Feltram, looking darkly in his face; but there was a laugh in his eyes.

"Yes; of course I drank it; my object was to please him."

"To be sure."

The faint wind that carried them across the lake had quite subsided by the time they had reached the side where they now were.

There was now not wind enough to fill the sail, and it was already evening.

"Give me an oar; we can pull her over in little more than an hour," said Sir Bale; "only let us get away."

He got into the boat, sat down, and placed the leather bag with its heavy freightage at his feet, and took an oar. Feltram loosed the rope and shoved the boat off; and taking his seat also, they began to pull together, without another word, until, in about ten minutes, they had got a considerable way off the Cloostedd shore.

The leather bag was too clumsy a burden to conceal; besides, Feltram knew all about the transaction, and Sir Bale had no need to make a secret. The bag was old and soiled, and tied about the "neck" with a long leather thong, and it seemed to have been sealed with red wax, fragments of which were still sticking to it.

He got it open, and found it full of guineas.

"Halt!" cried Sir Bale, delighted, for he had half apprehended a trick upon his hopes; "gold it is, and a lot of it, by Jove!"

Feltram did not seem to take the slightest interest in the matter. Sulkily and drowsily he was leaning with his elbow on his knee, and it seemed thinking of something far away. Sir Bale could not wait to count them any longer. He reckoned them on the bench, and found two thousand.

It took some time; and when he had got them back into the leather bag, and tied them up again, Feltram, with a sudden start, said sharply,

"Come, take your oar — unless you like the lake by night; and see, a wind will soon be up from Golden Friars!"

He cast a wild look towards Mardykes Hall and Snakes Island, and applying himself to his oar, told Sir Bale to take his also; and nothing loath, the Baronet did so.

It was slow work, for the boat was not built for speed; and by the time they had got about midway, the sun went down, and twilight and the melancholy flush of the sunset tints were upon the lake and fells.

"Ho! here comes the breeze — up from Golden Friars," said Feltram; "we shall have enough to fill the sails now. If you don't fear spirits and Snakes Island, it is all the better for us it should blow from that point. If it blew from Mardykes now, it would be a stiff pull for you and me to get this tub home."

Talking as if to himself, and laughing low, he adjusted the sail and took the tiller, and so, yielding to the rising breeze, the boat glided slowly toward still distant Mardykes Hall.

The moon came out, and the shore grew misty, and the towering fells rose like sheeted giants; and leaning on the gunwale of the boat, Sir Bale, with the rush and gurgle of the water on the boat's side sounding faintly in his ear, thought of his day's adventure, which seemed to him like a dream — incredible but for the heavy bag that lay between his feet.

As they passed Snakes Island, a little mist, like a fragment of a fog, seemed to drift with them, and Sir Bale fancied that whenever it came near the boat's side she made a dip, as if strained toward the water; and Feltram always put out his hand, as if waving it from him, and the mist seemed to obey the gesture; but returned again and again, and the same thing always happened.

It was three weeks after, that Sir Bale, sitting up in his bed, very pale and wan, with his silk nightcap nodding on one side, and his thin hand extended on the coverlet, where the doctor had been feeling his pulse, in his darkened room, related all the wonders of this day to Doctor Torvey. The doctor had attended him through a fever which followed immediately upon his visit to Cloostedd.

"And, my dear sir, by Jupiter, can you really believe all that delirium to be sober fact?" said the doctor, sitting by the bedside, and actually laughing.

"I can't help believing it, because I can't distinguish in any way between all that and everything else that actually happened, and which I must believe. And, except that this is more wonderful, I can find no reason to reject it, that does not as well apply to all the rest."

"Come, come, my dear sir, this will never do — nothing is more common. These illusions accompanying fever frequently antedate the attack, and the man is actually raving before he knows he is ill."

"But what do you make of that bag of gold?"

"Some one has lent it. You had better ask all about it of Feltram when you can see him; for in speaking to me he seemed to know all about it, and certainly did not seem to think the matter at all out of the commonplace. It is just like that fisherman's story,

about the hand that drew Feltram into the water on the night that he was nearly drowned. Every one can see what that was. Why of course it was simply the reflection of his own hand in the water, in that vivid lightning. When you have been out a little and have gained strength you will shake off these dreams."

"I should not wonder," said Sir Bale.

It is not to be supposed that Sir Bale reported all that was in his memory respecting his strange vision, if such it was, at Cloostedd. He made a selection of the incidents, and threw over the whole adventure an entirely accidental character, and described the money which the old man had thrown to him as amounting to a purse of five guineas, and mentioned nothing of the passages which bore on the coming race.

Good Doctor Torvey, therefore, reported only that Sir Bale's delirium had left two or three illusions sticking in his memory.

But if they were illusions, they survived the event of his recovery, and remained impressed on his memory with the sharpness of very recent and accurately observed fact.

He was resolved on going to the races of Rindermere, where, having in his possession so weighty a guarantee as the leather purse, he was determined to stake it all boldly on Rainbow — against which horse he was glad to hear there were very heavy odds.

The race came off. One horse was scratched, another bolted, the rider of a third turned out to have lost a buckle and three halfpence and so was an ounce and a half under weight, a fourth knocked down the post near Rinderness churchyard, and was held to have done it with his left instead of his right knee, and so had run at the wrong side. The result was that Rainbow came in first, and I should be afraid to say how much Sir Bale won. It was a sum that paid off a heavy debt, and left his affairs in a much more manageable state.

From this time Sir Bale prospered. He visited Cloostedd no more; but Feltram often crossed to that lonely shore as heretofore, and it is believed conveyed to him messages which guided his betting. One thing is certain, his luck never deserted him. His debts disappeared; and his love of continental life seemed to have departed. He became content with Mardykes Hall, laid out money on it, and although he never again cared to cross the lake, he seemed to like the scenery.

In some respects, however, he lived exactly the same odd and unpopular life. He saw no one at Mardykes Hall. He practised a very strict reserve. The neighbours laughed at and disliked him, and he was voted, whenever any accidental contact arose, a very disagreeable man; and he had a shrewd and ready sarcasm that made them afraid of him, and himself more disliked.

Odd rumours prevailed about his household. It was said that his old relations with Philip Feltram had become reversed; and that he was as meek as a mouse, and Feltram the bully now. It was also said that Mrs. Julaper had one Sunday evening when she drank tea at the Vicar's, told his good lady very mysteriously, and with many charges of secrecy, that Sir Bale was none the better of his late-found wealth; that he had a load upon his spirits, that he was afraid of Feltram, and so was every one else, more or less, in the house; that he was either mad or worse; and that it was an eerie dwelling, and strange company, and she should be glad herself of a change.

Good Mrs. Bedel told her friend Mrs. Torvey; and all Golden Friars heard all this, and a good deal more, in an incredibly short time.

All kinds of rumours now prevailed in Golden Friars, connecting Sir Bale's successes on the turf with some mysterious doings in Cloostedd Forest. Philip Feltram laughed when he heard these stories — especially when he heard the story that a supernatural personage had lent the Baronet a purse full of money.

"You should not talk to Doctor Torvey so, sir," said he grimly; "he's the greatest tattler in the town. It was old Farmer Trebeck, who could buy and sell us all down here, who lent that money. Partly from goodwill, but not without acknowledgment. He has my hand for the first, not worth much, and yours to a bond for the two thousand guineas you brought home with you. It seems strange you should not remember that venerable and kind old farmer whom you talked with so long that day. His grandson, who expects to stand well in his will, being a trainer in Lord Varney's stables, has sometimes a tip to give, and he is the source of your information."

"By Jove, I must be a bit mad, then, that's all," said Sir Bale, with a smile and a shrug.

Philip Feltram moped about the house, and did precisely what he pleased. The change which had taken place in him became more and more pronounced. Dark and stern he always looked, and often malignant. He was like a man possessed of one evil thought which never left him.

There was, besides, the good old Gothic superstition of a bargain or sale of the Baronet's soul to the arch-fiend. This was, of course, very cautiously whispered in a place where he had influence. It was only a coarser and directer version of a suspicion, that in a more credulous generation penetrated a level of society quite exempt from such follies in our day.

One evening at dusk, Sir Bale, sitting after his dinner in his window, saw the tall figure of Feltram, like a dark streak, standing movelessly by the lake. An unpleasant feeling moved him, and then an impatience. He got up, and having primed himself with two glasses of brandy, walked down to the edge of the lake, and placed himself beside Feltram.

"Looking down from the window," said he, nerved with his Dutch courage, "and seeing you standing like a post, do you know what I began to think of?"

Feltram looked at him, but answered nothing.

"I began to think of taking a wife — *marrying*."

Feltram nodded. The announcement had not produced the least effect.

"Why the devil will you make me so uncomfortable! Can't you be like yourself — what you *were*, I mean? I won't go on living here alone with you. I'll take a wife, I tell you. I'll choose a good churchgoing woman, that will have every man, woman, and child in the house on their marrow-bones twice a day, morning and evening, and three times on Sundays. How will you like that?"

"Yes, you will be married," said Feltram, with a quiet decision which chilled Sir Bale, for he had by no means made up his mind to that desperate step.

Feltram slowly walked away, and that conversation ended.

Now an odd thing happened about this time. There was a family of Feltram — county genealogists could show how related to the vanished family of Cloostedd — living at that time on their estate not far from Carlisle. Three co-heiresses now represented it. They were great beauties — the belles of their county in their day.

One was married to Sir Oliver Haworth of Haworth, a great family in those times. He was a knight of the shire, and had refused a baronetage, and, it was said, had his eye on a peerage. The other sister was married to Sir William Walsingham, a wealthy baronet; and the third and youngest, Miss Janet, was still unmarried, and at home at Cloudesly Hall, where her aunt, Lady Harbottle, lived with her, and made a dignified chaperon.

Now it so fell out that Sir Bale, having business at Carlisle, and knowing old Lady Harbottle, paid his respects at Cloudesly Hall; and being no less than five-and-forty years of age, was for the first time in his life, seriously in love.

Miss Janet was extremely pretty — a fair beauty with brilliant red lips and large blue eyes, and ever so many pretty dimples when she talked and smiled. It was odd, but not perhaps against the course of nature, that a man, though so old as he, and quite *blasé*, should fall at last under that fascination.

But what are we to say of the strange infatuation of the young lady? No one could tell why she liked him. It was a craze. Her family were against it, her intimates, her old nurse — all would not do; and the oddest thing was, that he seemed to take no pains to please her. The end of this strange courtship was that he married her; and she came home to Mardykes Hall, determined to please everybody, and to be the happiest woman in England.

With her came a female cousin, a good deal her senior, past thirty — Gertrude Mainyard, pale and sad, but very gentle, and with all the prettiness that can belong to her years.

This young lady has a romance. Her hero is far away in India; and she, content to await his uncertain return with means to accomplish the hope of their lives, in that frail chance has long embarked all the purpose and love of her life.

When Lady Mardykes came home, a new leaf was, as the phrase is, turned over. The neighbours and all the country people were willing to give the Hall a new trial. There was visiting and returning of visits; and young Lady Mardykes was liked and admired. It could not indeed have been otherwise. But here the improvement in the relations of Mardykes Hall with other homes ceased. On one excuse or another Sir Bale postponed or evaded the hospitalities which establish intimacies. Some people said he was jealous of his young and beautiful wife. But for the most part his reserve was set down to the old inhospitable cause, some ungenial defect in his character; and in a little time the tramp of horses and roll of carriage-wheels were seldom heard up or down the broad avenue of Mardykes Hall.

Sir Bale liked this seclusion; and his wife, “so infatuated with her idolatry of that graceless old man,” as surrounding young ladies said, that she was well content to forego the society of the county people for a less interrupted enjoyment of that of her husband. “What she could see in him” to interest or amuse her so, that for his sake she was willing to be “buried alive in that lonely place,” the same critics were perpetually wondering.

A year and more passed thus; for the young wife, happily — *very* happily indeed, had it not been for one topic on which she and her husband could not agree. This was Philip Feltram; and an odd quarrel it was.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *Sir Bale is Frightened*

To Feltram she had conceived, at first sight, a horror. It was not a mere antipathy; fear mingled largely in it. Although she did not see him often, this restless dread grew upon her so, that she urged his dismissal upon Sir Bale, offering to provide, herself, for him a handsome annuity, charged on that part of her property which, by her marriage settlement, had remained in her power. There was a time when Sir Bale was only too anxious to get rid of him. But that was changed now. Nothing could now induce the Baronet to part with him. He at first evaded and resisted quietly. But, urged with a perseverance to which he was unused, he at last broke into fury that appalled her, and swore that if he was worried more upon the subject, he would leave her and the country, and see neither again. This exhibition of violence affrighted her all the more by reason of the contrast; for up to this he had been an uxorious husband. Lady Mardykes was in hysterics, and thoroughly frightened, and remained in her room for two or three days. Sir Bale went up to London about business, and was not home for more than a week. This was the first little squall that disturbed the serenity of their sky.

This point, therefore, was settled; but soon there came other things to sadden Lady Mardykes. There occurred a little incident, soon after Sir Bale's return from London, which recalled the topic on which they had so nearly quarrelled.

Sir Bale had a dressing-room, remote from the bedrooms, in which he sat and read and sometimes smoked. One night, after the house was all quiet, the Baronet being still up, the bell of this dressing-room rang long and furiously. It was such a peal as a person in extreme terror might ring. Lady Mardykes, with her maid in her room, heard it; and in great alarm she ran in her dressing-gown down the gallery to Sir Bale's room. Mallard the butler had already arrived, and was striving to force the door, which was secured. It gave way just as she reached it, and she rushed through.

Sir Bale was standing with the bell-rope in his hand, in the extremest agitation, looking like a ghost; and Philip Feltram was sitting in his chair, with a dark smile fixed upon him. For a minute she thought he had attempted to assassinate his master. She could not otherwise account for the scene.

There had been nothing of the kind, however; as her husband assured her again and again, as she lay sobbing on his breast, with her arms about his neck.

"To her dying hour," she afterwards said to her cousin, "she never could forget the dreadful look in Feltram's face."

No explanation of that scene did she ever obtain from Sir Bale, nor any clue to the cause of the agony that was so powerfully expressed in his countenance. Thus much only she learned from him, that Feltram had sought that interview for the purpose of announcing his departure, which was to take place within the year.

"You are not sorry to hear that. But if you knew all, you might. Let the curse fly where it may, it will come back to roost. So, darling, let us discuss him no more. Your wish is granted, *dis iratis*."

Some crisis, during this interview, seemed to have occurred in the relations between Sir Bale and Feltram. Henceforward they seldom exchanged a word; and when they did speak, it was coldly and shortly, like men who were nearly strangers.

One day in the courtyard, Sir Bale seeing Feltram leaning upon the parapet that overlooks the lake, approached him, and said in a low tone,

"I've been thinking if we — that is, I — do owe that money to old Trebeck, it is high time I should pay it. I was ill, and had lost my head at the time; but it turned out luckily, and it ought to be paid. I don't like the idea of a bond turning up, and a lot of interest."

"The old fellow meant it for a present. He is richer than you are; he wished to give the family a lift. He has destroyed the bond, I believe, and in no case will he take payment."

"No fellow has a right to force his money on another," answered Sir Bale. "I never asked him. Besides, as you know, I was not really myself, and the whole thing seems to me quite different from what you say it was; and, so far as my brain is concerned, it was all a phantasmagoria; but, you say, it was he."

"Every man is accountable for what he intends and for what he *thinks* he does," said Feltram cynically.

"Well, I'm accountable for dealing with that wicked old dicer I *thought* I saw — isn't that it? But I must pay old Trebeck all the same, since the money was his. Can you manage a meeting?"

"Look down here. Old Trebeck has just landed; he will sleep tonight at the George and Dragon, to meet his cattle in the morning at Golden Friars fair. You can speak to him yourself."

So saying Feltram glided away, leaving Sir Bale the task of opening the matter to the wealthy farmer of Cloostedd Fells.

A broad night of steps leads down from the courtyard to the level of the jetty at the lake: and Sir Bale descended, and accosted the venerable farmer, who was bluff, honest, and as frank as a man can be who speaks a *patois* which hardly a living man but himself can understand.

Sir Bale asked him to come to the Hall and take luncheon; but Trebeck was in haste. Cattle had arrived which he wanted to look at, and a pony awaited him on the road, hard by, to Golden Friars; and the old fellow must mount and away.

Then Sir Bale, laying his hand upon his arm in a manner that was at once lofty and affectionate, told in his ears the subject on which he wished to be understood.

The old farmer looked hard at him, and shook his head and laughed in a way that would have been insupportable in a house, and told him, "I hev narra bond o' thoine, mon."

"I know how that is; so does Philip Feltram."

"Well?"

"Well, I must replace the money."

The old man laughed again, and in his outlandish dialect told him to wait till he asked him. Sir Bale pressed it, but the old fellow put it off with outlandish banter; and as the Baronet grew testy, the farmer only waxed more and more hilarious, and at last, mounting his shaggy pony, rode off, still laughing, at a canter to Golden Friars; and when he reached Golden Friars, and got into the hall of the George and Dragon, he asked Richard Turnbull with a chuckle if he ever knew a man refuse an offer of money, or a man want to pay who did not owe; and inquired whether the Squire down at Mardykes Hall mightn't be a bit "wrang in t' garrets." All this, however, other people said, was intended merely to conceal the fact that he really had, through sheer loyalty, lent the money, or rather bestowed it, thinking the old family in jeopardy, and meaning a gift, was determined to hear no more about it. I can't say; I only know people held, some by one interpretation, some by another.

As the caterpillar sickens and changes its hue when it is about to undergo its transformation, so an odd change took place in Feltram. He grew even more silent and morose; he seemed always in an agitation and a secret rage. He used to walk through the woodlands on the slopes of the fells above Mardykes, muttering to himself, picking up the rotten sticks with which the ground was strewn, breaking them in his hands, and hurling them from him, and stamping on the earth as he paced up and down.

One night a thunderstorm came on, the wind blowing gently up from Golden Friars. It was a night black as pitch, illuminated only by the intermittent glare of the lightning. At the foot of the stairs Sir Bale met Feltram, whom he had not seen for some days. He had his cloak and hat on.

"I am going to Cloostedd tonight," he said, "and if all is as I expect, I sha'n't return. We remember all, you and I." And he nodded and walked down the passage.

Sir Bale knew that a crisis had happened in his own life. He felt faint and ill, and returned to the room where he had been sitting. Throughout that melancholy night he did not go to his bed.

In the morning he learned that Marlin, who had been out late, saw Feltram get the boat off, and sail towards the other side. The night was so dark that he could only see him start; but the wind was light and coming up the lake, so that without a tack he could easily make the other side. Feltram did not return. The boat was found fast to the ring at Cloostedd landing-place.

Lady Mardykes was relieved, and for a time was happier than ever. It was different with Sir Bale; and afterwards her sky grew dark also.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *A Lady in Black*

Shortly after this, there arrived at the George and Dragon a stranger. He was a man somewhat past forty, embrowned by distant travel, and, his years considered, wonderfully good-looking. He had good eyes; his dark-brown hair had no sprinkling of gray in it; and his kindly smile showed very white and even teeth. He made inquiries about neighbours, especially respecting Mardykes Hall; and the answers seemed to interest him profoundly. He inquired after Philip Feltram, and shed tears when he heard that he was no longer at Mardykes Hall, and that Trebeck or other friends could give him no tidings of him.

And then he asked Richard Turnbull to show him to a quiet room; and so, taking the honest fellow by the hand, he said,

"Mr. Turnbull, don't you know me?"

"No, sir," said the host of the George and Dragon, after a puzzled stare, "I can't say I do, sir."

The stranger smiled a little sadly, and shook his head: and with a gentle laugh, still holding his hand in a very friendly way, he said, "I should have known you anywhere, Mr. Turnbull — anywhere on earth or water. Had you turned up on the Himalayas, or in a junk on the Canton river, or as a dervish in the mosque of St. Sophia, I should have recognised my old friend, and asked what news from Golden Friars. But of course I'm changed. You were a little my senior; and one advantage among many you have over your juniors is that you don't change as we do. I have played many a game of hand-ball in the inn-yard of the George, Mr. Turnbull. You often wagered a pot of ale on my play; you used to say I'd make the best player of fives, and the best singer of a song, within ten miles round the meer. You used to have me behind the bar when I was a boy, with more of an appetite than I have now. I was then at Mardykes Hall, and used to go back in old Marlin's boat. Is old Marlin still alive?"

"Ay, that — he — is," said Turnbull slowly, as he eyed the stranger again carefully. "I don't know who you can be, sir, unless you are — the boy — William Feltram. La! he was seven or eight years younger than Philip. But, lawk! — Well — By Jen, and *be* you Willie Feltram? But no, you can't!"

"Ay, Mr. Turnbull, that very boy — Willie Feltram — even he, and no other; and now you'll shake hands with me, not so formally, but like an old friend."

"Ay, that I will," said honest Richard Turnbull, with a great smile, and a hearty grasp of his guest's hand; and they both laughed together, and the younger man's eyes, for he was an affectionate fool, filled up with tears.

"And I want you to tell me this," said William, after they had talked a little quietly, "now that there is no one to interrupt us, what has become of my brother Philip? I heard from a friend an account of his health that has caused me unspeakable anxiety."

"His health was not bad; no, he was a hardy lad, and liked a walk over the fells, or a pull on the lake; but he was a bit daft, every one said, and a changed man; and, in troth, they say the air o' Mardykes don't agree with every one, no more than him. But that's a tale that's neither here nor there."

"Yes," said William, "that was what they told me — his mind affected. God help and guard us! I have been unhappy ever since; and if I only knew it was well with poor Philip, I think I should be too happy. And where is Philip now?"

"He crossed the lake one night, having took leave of Sir Bale. They thought he was going to old Trebeck's up the Fells. He likes the Feltrams, and likes the folk at Mardykes Hall — though those two families was not always o'er kind to one another. But Trebeck seed nowt o' him, nor no one else; and what has gone wi' him no one can tell."

"I heard that also," said William with a deep sigh. "But I hoped it had been cleared up by now, and something happier been known of the poor fellow by this time. I'd give a great deal to know — I don't know what I *would* not give to know — I'm so unhappy about him. And now, my good old friend, tell your people to get me a chaise, for I must go to Mardykes Hall; and, first, let me have a room to dress in."

At Mardykes Hall a pale and pretty lady was looking out, alone, from the stone-shafted drawingroom window across the courtyard and the balustrade, on which stood many a great stone cup with flowers, whose leaves were half shed and gone with the winds — emblem of her hopes. The solemn melancholy of the towering fells, the ripple of the lonely lake, deepened her sadness.

The unwonted sound of carriage-wheels awoke her from her reverie.

Before the chaise reached the steps, a hand from its window had seized the handle, the door was thrown open, and William Feltram jumped out.

She was in the hall, she knew not how; and, with a wild scream and a sob, she threw herself into his arms.

Here at last was an end of the long waiting, the dejection which had reached almost the point of despair. And like two rescued from shipwreck, they clung together in an agony of happiness.

William had come back with no very splendid fortune. It was enough, and only enough, to enable them to marry. Prudent people would have thought it, very likely, too little. But he was now home in England, with health unimpaired by his long sojourn in the East, and with intelligence and energies improved by the discipline of his arduous struggle with fortune. He reckoned, therefore, upon one way or other adding something to their income; and he knew that a few hundreds a year would make them happier than hundreds of thousands could other people.

It was five years since they had parted in France, where a journey of importance to the Indian firm, whose right hand he was, had brought him.

The refined tastes that are supposed to accompany gentle blood, his love of art, his talent for music and drawing, had accidentally attracted the attention of the little travelling-party which old Lady Harbottle chaperoned. Miss Janet, now Lady Mardykes, learning that his name was Feltram, made inquiry through a common friend, and learned what interested her still more about him. It ended in an acquaintance, which his manly and gentle nature and his entertaining qualities soon improved into an intimacy.

Feltram had chosen to work his own way, being proud, and also prosperous enough to prevent his pride, in this respect, from being placed under too severe a pressure of temptation. He heard not from but of his brother, through a friend in London, and more lately from Gertrude, whose account of him was sad and even alarming.

When Lady Mardykes came in, her delight knew no bounds. She had already formed a plan for their future, and was not to be put off — William Feltram was to take the great grazing farm that belonged to the Mardykes estate; or, if he preferred it, to farm it for her, sharing the profits. She wanted something to interest her, and this was just the thing. It was hardly half-a-mile away, up the lake, and there was such a comfortable house and garden, and she and Gertrude could be as much together as ever almost; and, in fact, Gertrude and her husband could be nearly always at Mardykes Hall.

So eager and entreating was she, that there was no escape. The plan was adopted immediately on their marriage, and no happier neighbours for a time were ever known.

But was Lady Mardykes content? was she even exempt from the heartache which each mortal thinks he has all to himself? The longing of her life was for children; and again and again had her hopes been disappointed.

One tiny pretty little baby indeed was born, and lived for two years, and then died; and none had come to supply its place and break the childless silence in the great old nursery. That was her sorrow; a greater one than men can understand.

Another source of grief was this: that Sir Bale Mardykes conceived a dislike to William Feltram that was unaccountable. At first suppressed, it betrayed itself negatively only; but with time it increased; and in the end the Baronet made little secret of his wish to get rid of him. Many and ingenious were the annoyances he contrived; and at last he told his wife plainly that he wished William Feltram to find some other abode for himself.

Lady Mardykes pleaded earnestly, and even with tears; for if Gertrude were to leave the neighbourhood, she well knew how utterly solitary her own life would become.

Sir Bale at last vouchsafed some little light as to his motives. There was an old story, he told her, that his estate would go to a Feltram. He had an instinctive distrust of that family. It was a feeling not given him for nothing; it might be the means of defeating their plotting and strategy. Old Trebeck, he fancied, had a finger in it. Philip Feltram had told him that Mardykes was to pass away to a Feltram. Well, they might conspire; but he would take what care he could that the estate should not be stolen from his family. He did not want his wife stript of her jointure, or his children, if he had any, left without bread.

All this sounded very like madness; but the idea was propounded by Philip Feltram. His own jealousy was at bottom founded on superstition which he would not avow and could hardly define. He bitterly blamed himself for having permitted William Feltram to place himself where he was.

In the midst of these annoyances William Feltram was seriously thinking of throwing up the farm, and seeking similar occupation somewhere else.

One day, walking alone in the thick wood that skirts the lake near his farm, he was discussing this problem with himself; and every now and then he repeated his question, "Shall I throw it up, and give him the lease back if he likes?" On a sudden he heard a voice near him say:

"Hold it, you fool! — hold hard, you fool! — hold it, you fool!"

The situation being lonely, he was utterly puzzled to account for the interruption, until on a sudden a huge parrot, green, crimson, and yellow, plunged from among the boughs over his head to the ground, and partly flying, and partly hopping and tumbling along, got lamely, but swiftly, out of sight among the thick underwood; and he could neither start it nor hear it any more. The interruption reminded him of that which befel Robinson Crusoe. It was more singular, however; for he owned no such bird; and its strangeness impressed the omen all the more.

He related it when he got home to his wife; and as people when living a solitary life, and also suffering, are prone to superstition, she did not laugh at the adventure, as in a healthier state of spirits, I suppose, she would.

They continued, however, to discuss the question together; and all the more industriously as a farm of the same kind, only some fifteen miles away, was now offered to all bidders, under another landlord. Gertrude, who felt Sir Bale's unkindness all the more that she was a distant cousin of his, as it had proved on comparing notes, was very strong in favour of the change, and had been urging it with true feminine ingenuity and persistence upon her husband. A very singular dream rather damped her ardour, however, and it appeared thus:

She had gone to her bed full of this subject; and she thought, although she could not remember having done so, had fallen asleep. She was still thinking, as she had been all the day, about leaving the farm. It seemed to her that she was quite awake, and a candle burning all the time in the room, awaiting the return of her husband, who was away at the fair near Haworth; she saw the interior of the room distinctly. It was a sultry night, and a little bit of the window was raised. A very slight sound in that direction attracted her attention; and to her surprise she saw a jay hop upon the windowsill, and into the room.

Up sat Gertrude, surprised and a little startled at the visit of so large a bird, without presence of mind for the moment even to frighten it away, and staring at it, as they say, with all her eyes. A sofa stood at the foot of the bed; and under this the bird swiftly hopped. She extended her hand now to take the bell-rope at the left side of the bed, and in doing so displaced the curtains, which were open only at the foot. She was amazed there to see a lady dressed entirely in black, and with the oldfashioned hood over her head. She was young and pretty, and looked kindly at her, but with now and then a slight contraction of lips and eyebrows that indicates pain. This little twitching was momentary, and recurred, it seemed, about once or twice in a minute.

How it was that she was not frightened on seeing this lady, standing like an old friend at her bedside, she could not afterwards understand. Some influence besides the kindness of her look prevented any sensation of terror at the time. With a very white hand the young lady in black held a white handkerchief pressed to her bosom at the top of her bodice.

"Who are you?" asked Gertrude.

"I am a kinswoman, although you don't know me; and I have come to tell you that you must not leave Faxwell" (the name of the place) "or Janet. If you go, I will go with you; and I can make you fear me."

Her voice was very distinct, but also very faint, with something undulatory in it, that seemed to enter Gertrude's head rather than her ear.



Saying this she smiled horribly, and, lifting her handkerchief, disclosed for a moment a great wound in her breast, deep in which Gertrude saw darkly the head of a snake writhing.

Hereupon she uttered a wild scream of terror, and, diving under the bedclothes, remained more dead than alive there, until her maid, alarmed by her cry, came in, and having searched the room, and shut the window at her desire, did all in her power to comfort her.

If this was a nightmare and embodied only by a form of expression which in some states belongs to the imagination, a leading idea in the controversy in which her mind had long been employed, it had at least the effect of deciding her against leaving Faxwell. And so that point was settled; and unpleasant relations continued between the tenants of the farm and the master of Mardykes Hall.

To Lady Mardykes all this was very painful, although Sir Bale did not insist upon making a separation between his wife and her cousin. But to Mardykes Hall that cousin came no more. Even Lady Mardykes thought it better to see her at Faxwell than to risk a meeting in the temper in which Sir Bale then was. And thus several years passed.

No tidings of Philip Feltram were heard; and, in fact, none ever reached that part of the world; and if it had not been highly improbable that he could have drowned himself in the lake without his body sooner or later having risen to the surface, it would have been concluded that he had either accidentally or by design made away with himself in its waters.

Over Mardykes Hall there was a gloom — no sound of children's voices was heard there, and even the hope of that merry advent had died out.

This disappointment had no doubt helped to fix in Sir Bale's mind the idea of the insecurity of his property, and the morbid fancy that William Feltram and old Trebeck were conspiring to seize it; than which, I need hardly say, no imagination more insane could have fixed itself in his mind.

In other things, however, Sir Bale was shrewd and sharp, a clear and rapid man of business, and although this was a strange whim, it was not so unnatural in a man who was by nature so prone to suspicion as Sir Bale Mardykes.

During the years, now seven, that had elapsed since the marriage of Sir Bale and Miss Janet Feltram, there had happened but one event, except the death of their only child, to place them in mourning. That was the decease of Sir William Walsingham, the husband of Lady Mardykes' sister. She now lived in a handsome old dower-house at Islington, and being wealthy, made now and then an excursion to Mardykes Hall, in which she was sometimes accompanied by her sister Lady Haworth. Sir Oliver being a Parliament-man was much in London and deep in politics and intrigue, and subject, as convivial rogues are, to occasional hard hits from gout.

But change and separation had made no alteration in these ladies' mutual affections, and no three sisters were ever more attached.

Was Lady Mardykes happy with her lord? A woman so gentle and loving as she, is a happy wife with any husband who is not an absolute brute. There must have been, I suppose, some good about Sir Bale. His wife was certainly deeply attached to him. She admired his wisdom, and feared his inflexible will, and altogether made of him a domestic idol. To acquire this enviable position, I suspect there must be something not essentially disagreeable about a man. At all events, what her neighbours goodnaturedly termed her infatuation continued, and indeed rather improved by time.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *An Old Portrait*

Sir Bale — whom some remembered a gay and convivial man, not to say a profligate one — had grown to be a very gloomy man indeed. There was something weighing upon his mind; and I daresay some of the good gossips of Golden Friars, had there been any materials for such a case, would have believed that Sir Bale had murdered Philip Feltram, and was now the victim of the worm and fire of remorse.

The gloom of the master of the house made his very servants gloomy, and the house itself looked sombre, as if it had been startled with strange and dismal sights.

Lady Mardykes was something of an artist. She had lighted lately, in an out-of-the-way room, upon a dozen or more old portraits. Several of these were full-lengths; and she was — with the help of her maid, both in long aprons, amid sponges and basins, soft handkerchiefs and varnish-pots and brushes — busy in removing the dust and smoke-stains, and in laying-on the varnish, which brought out the colouring, and made the transparent shadows yield up their long-buried treasures of finished detail.

Against the wall stood a full-length portrait as Sir Bale entered the room; having for a wonder, a word to say to his wife.

“O,” said the pretty lady, turning to him in her apron, and with her brush in her hand, “we are in such a pickle, Munnings and I have been cleaning these old pictures. Mrs. Julaper says they are the pictures that came from Cloostedd Hall long ago. They were buried in dust in the dark room in the clock-tower. Here is such a characteristic one. It has a long powdered wig — George the First or Second, I don’t know which — and such a combination of colours, and such a face. It seems starting out of the canvas, and all but speaks. Do look; that is, I mean, Bale, if you can spare time.”

Sir Bale abstractedly drew near, and looked over his wife’s shoulder on the full-length portrait that stood before him; and as he did so a strange expression for a moment passed over his face.

The picture represented a man of swarthy countenance, with signs of the bottle glowing through the dark skin; small fierce pig eyes, a rather flat pendulous nose, and a grim forbidding mouth, with a large wart a little above it. On the head hung one of those full-bottomed powdered wigs that look like a cloud of cotton-wadding; a lace cravat was about his neck; he wore short black-velvet breeches with stockings rolled over them, a bottle-green coat of cut velvet and a crimson waistcoat with long flaps; coat and waistcoat both heavily laced with gold. He wore a sword, and leaned upon a crutch-handled cane, and his figure and aspect indicated a swollen and gouty state. He could not be far from sixty. There was uncommon force in this fierce and forbidding-looking portrait. Lady Mardykes said, “What wonderful dresses they wore! How like a fine magic-lantern figure he looks! What gorgeous colouring! it looks like the plumage of a mackaw; and what a claw his hand is! and that huge broken beak of a nose! Isn’t he like a wicked old mackaw?”

“Where did you find that?” asked Sir Bale.

Surprised at his tone, she looked round, and was still more surprised at his looks.

“I told you, dear Bale, I found them in the clock-tower. I hope I did right; it was not wrong bringing them here? I ought to have asked. Are you vexed, Bale?”

“Vexed! not I. I only wish it was in the fire. I must have seen that picture when I was a child. I hate to look at it. I raved about it once, when I was ill. I don’t know who it is; I don’t remember when I saw it. I wish you’d tell them to burn it.”

“It is one of the Feltrams,” she answered. “Sir Hugh Feltram” is on the frame at the foot; and old Mrs. Julaper says he was the father of the unhappy lady who was said to have been drowned near Snakes Island.”

“Well, suppose he is; there’s nothing interesting in that. It is a disgusting picture. I connect it with my illness; and I think it is the kind of thing that would make any one half mad, if they only looked at it often enough. Tell them to burn it; and come away, come to the next room; I can’t say what I want here.”

Sir Bale seemed to grow more and more agitated the longer he remained in the room. He seemed to her both frightened and furious; and taking her a little roughly by the wrist, he led her through the door.

When they were in another apartment alone, he again asked the affrighted lady who had told her that picture was there, and who told her to clean it.

She had only the truth to plead. It was, from beginning to end, the merest accident.

“If I thought, Janet, that you were taking counsel of others, talking me over, and trying clever experiments — “ he stopped short with his eyes fixed on hers with black suspicion.

His wife’s answer was one pleading look, and to burst into tears.

Sir Bale let-go her wrist, which he had held up to this; and placing his hand gently on her shoulder, he said,

“You must not cry, Janet; I have given you no excuse for tears. I only wished an answer to a very harmless question; and I am sure you would tell me, if by any chance you have lately seen Philip Feltram; he is capable of arranging all that. No one knows him as I do. There, you must not cry any more; but tell me truly, has he turned up? is he at Faxwell?”

She denied all this with perfect truth; and after a hesitation of some time, the matter ended. And as soon as she and he were more themselves, he had something quite different to tell her.

“Sit down, Janet; sit down, and forget that vile picture and all I have been saying. What I came to tell you, I think you will like; I am sure it will please you.”

And with this little preface he placed his arm about her neck, and kissed her tenderly. She certainly was pleased; and when his little speech was over, she, smiling, with her tears still wet upon her cheeks, put her arms round her husband’s neck, and in turn kissed him with the ardour of gratitude, kissed him affectionately; again and again thanking him all the time.

It was no great matter, but from Sir Bale Mardykes it was something quite unusual.

Was it a sudden whim? What was it? Something had prompted Sir Bale, early in that dark shrewd month of December, to tell his wife that he wished to call together some of his county acquaintances, and to fill his house for a week or so, as near Christmas as she could get them to come. He wished her sisters — Lady Haworth (with her husband) and the Dowager Lady Walsingham — to be invited for an early day, before the coming of the other guests, so that she might enjoy their society for a little time quietly to herself before the less intimate guests should assemble.

Glad was Lady Mardykes to hear the resolve of her husband, and prompt to obey. She wrote to her sisters to beg them to arrange to come, together, by the tenth or twelfth of the month, which they accordingly arranged to do. Sir Oliver, it was true, could not be of the party. A minister of state was drinking the waters at Bath; and Sir Oliver thought it would do him no harm to sip a little also, and his fashionable doctor politely agreed, and “ordered” to those therapeutic springs the knight of the shire, who was “consumedly vexed” to lose the Christmas with that jolly dog, Bale, down at Mardykes Hall. But a fellow must have a stomach for his Christmas pudding, and politics takes it out of a poor gentleman deucedly; and health’s the first thing, egad!

So Sir Oliver went down to Bath, and I don’t know that he tumbled much of the waters, but he did drink the burgundy of that haunt of the ailing; and he had the honour of making a fourth not unfrequently in the secretary of state’s whist-parties.

It was about the 8th of December when, in Lady Walsingham’s carriage, intending to post all the way, that lady, still young, and Lady Haworth, with all the servants that were usual in such expeditions in those days, started from the great Dower House at Islington in high spirits.

Lady Haworth had not been very well — low and nervous; but the clear frosty sun, and the pleasant nature of the excursion, raised her spirits to the point of enjoyment; and expecting nothing but happiness and gaiety — for, after all, Sir Bale was but one of a large party, and even he could make an effort and be agreeable as well as hospitable on occasion — they set out on their northward expedition. The journey, which is a long one, they had resolved to break into a four days’ progress; and the inns had been written to, bespeaking a comfortable reception.

## CHAPTER XXV

### *Through the Wall*

On the third night they put-up at the comfortable old inn called the Three Nuns. With an effort they might easily have pushed on to Mardykes Hall that night, for the distance is not more than five-and-thirty miles. But, considering her sister's health, Lady Walsingham in planning their route had resolved against anything like a forced march.

Here the ladies took possession of the best sitting-room; and, notwithstanding the fatigue of the journey, Lady Haworth sat up with her sister till near ten o'clock, chatting gaily about a thousand things.

Of the three sisters, Lady Walsingham was the eldest. She had been in the habit of taking the command at home; and now, for advice and decision, her younger sisters, less prompt and courageous than she, were wont, whenever in her neighbourhood, to throw upon her all the cares and agitations of determining what was best to be done in small things and great. It is only fair to say, in addition, that this submission was not by any means exacted; it was the deference of early habit and feebleness of will, for she was neither officious nor imperious.

It was now time that Lady Haworth, a good deal more fatigued than her sister, should take leave of her for the night.

Accordingly they kissed and bid each other goodnight; and Lady Walsingham, not yet disposed to sleep, sat for some time longer in the comfortable room where they had taken tea, amusing the time with the book that had, when conversation flagged, beguiled the weariness of the journey. Her sister had been in her room nearly an hour, when she became herself a little sleepy. She had lighted her candle, and was going to ring for her maid, when, to her surprise, the door opened, and her sister Lady Haworth entered in a dressing-gown, looking frightened.

"My darling Mary!" exclaimed Lady Walsingham, "what is the matter? Are you well?"

"Yes, darling," she answered, "quite well; that is, I don't know what is the matter — I'm frightened." She paused, listening, with her eyes turned towards the wall. "O, darling Maud, I am so frightened! I don't know what it can be."

"You must not be agitated, darling; there's nothing. You have been asleep, and I suppose you have had a dream. Were you asleep?"

Lady Haworth had caught her sister fast by the arm with both hands, and was looking wildly in her face.

"Have *you* heard nothing?" she asked, again looking towards the wall of the room, as if she expected to hear a voice through it.

"Nonsense, darling; you are dreaming still. Nothing; there has been nothing to hear. I have been awake ever since; if there had been anything to hear, I could not have missed it. Come, sit down. Sip a little of this water; you are nervous, and over-tired; and tell me plainly, like a good little soul, what is the matter; for nothing has happened here; and you ought to know that the Three Nuns is the quietest house in England; and I'm no witch, and if you won't tell me what's the matter, I can't divine it."

"Yes, of course," said Mary, sitting down, and glancing round her wildly. "I don't hear it now; *you* don't?"

"Do, my dear Mary, tell me what you mean," said Lady Walsingham kindly but firmly.

Lady Haworth was holding the still untasted glass of water in her hand.

"Yes, I'll tell you; I have been so frightened! You are right; I had a dream, but I can scarcely remember anything of it, except the very end, when I wakened. But it was not the dream; only it was connected with what terrified me so. I was so tired when I went to bed, I thought I should have slept soundly; and indeed I fell asleep immediately; and I must have slept quietly for a good while. How long is it since I left you?"

"More than an hour."

"Yes, I must have slept a good while; for I don't think I have been ten minutes awake. How my dream began I don't know. I remember only that gradually it came to this: I was standing in a recess in a panelled gallery; it was lofty, and, I thought, belonged to a handsome but old-fashioned house. I was looking straight towards the head of a wide staircase, with a great oak banister. At the top of the stairs, as near to me, about, as that window there, was a thick short column of oak, on top of which was a candlestick. There was no other light but from that one candle; and there was a lady standing beside it, looking down the stairs, with her back turned towards me; and from her gestures I should have thought speaking to people on a lower lobby, but whom from my place I could not see. I soon perceived that this lady was in great agony of mind; for she beat her breast and wrung her hands every now and then, and wagged her head slightly from side to side, like a person in great distraction. But one word she said I could not hear. Nor when she struck her hand on the banister, or stamped, as she seemed to do in her pain, upon the floor, could I hear any sound. I found myself somehow waiting upon this lady, and was watching her with awe and sympathy. But who she was I knew not, until turning towards me I plainly saw Janet's face, pale and covered with tears, and with such a look of agony as — O God! — I can never forget."

"Pshaw! Mary darling, what is it but a dream! I have had a thousand more startling; it is only that you are so nervous just now."

"But that is not all — nothing; what followed is so dreadful; for either there is something very horrible going on at Mardykes, or else I am losing my reason," said Lady Haworth in increasing agitation. "I wakened instantly in great alarm, but I suppose no more than I have felt a hundred times on awakening from a frightful dream. I sat up in my bed; I was thinking of ringing for Winnefred, my heart was beating so, but feeling better soon I changed my mind. All this time I heard a faint sound of a voice, as if coming through a thick wall. It came from the wall at the left side of my bed, and I fancied was that of some woman lamenting in a room separated from me by that thick partition. I could only perceive that it was a sound of crying mingled with ejaculations of misery, or fear, or entreaty. I listened with a painful curiosity, wondering who it could be, and what could have happened in the neighbouring rooms of the house; and as I looked and listened, I could distinguish my own name, but at first nothing more. That, of course, might have been an accident; and I knew there were many Marys in the world besides myself. But

it made me more curious; and a strange thing struck me, for I was now looking at that very wall through which the sounds were coming. I saw that there was a window in it. Thinking that the rest of the wall might nevertheless be covered by another room, I drew the curtain of it and looked out. But there is no such thing. It is the outer wall the entire way along. And it is equally impossible of the other wall, for it is to the front of the house, and has two windows in it; and the wall that the head of my bed stands against has the gallery outside it all the way; for I remarked that as I came to you."

"Tut, tut, Mary darling, nothing on earth is so deceptive as sound; this and fancy account for everything."

"But hear me out; I have not told you all. I began to hear the voice more clearly, and at last quite distinctly. It was Janet's, and she was conjuring you by name, as well as me, to come to her to Mardykes, without delay, in her extremity; yes, *you*, just as vehemently as me. It was Janet's voice. It still seemed separated by the wall, but I heard every syllable now; and I never heard voice or words of such anguish. She was imploring of us to come on, without a moment's delay, to Mardykes; and crying that, if we were not with her, she should go mad."

"Well, darling," said Lady Walsingham, "you see I'm included in this invitation as well as you, and should hate to disappoint Janet just as much; and I do assure you, in the morning you will laugh over this fancy with me; or rather, she will laugh over it with us, when we get to Mardykes. What you do want is rest, and a little sal-volatile."

So saying she rang the bell for Lady Haworth's maid. Having comforted her sister, and made her take the nervous specific she recommended, she went with her to her room; and taking possession of the armchair by the fire, she told her that she would keep her company until she was asleep, and remain long enough to be sure that the sleep was not likely to be interrupted. Lady Haworth had not been ten minutes in her bed, when she raised herself with a start to her elbow, listening with parted lips and wild eyes, her trembling fingers behind her ears. With an exclamation of horror, she cried,

"There it is again, upbraiding us! I can't stay longer."

She sprang from the bed, and rang the bell violently.

"Maud," she cried in an ecstasy of horror, "nothing shall keep me here, whether you go or not. I will set out the moment the horses are put to. If you refuse to come, Maud, mind the responsibility is yours — listen!" and with white face and starting eyes she pointed to the wall. "Have you ears; don't you hear?"

The sight of a person in extremity of terror so mysterious, might have unnerved a ruder system than Lady Walsingham's. She was pale as she replied; for under certain circumstances those terrors which deal with the supernatural are more contagious than any others. Lady Walsingham still, in terms, held to her opinion; but although she tried to smile, her face showed that the panic had touched her.

"Well, dear Mary," she said, "as you will have it so, I see no good in resisting you longer. Here, it is plain, your nerves will not suffer you to rest. Let us go then, in heaven's name; and when you get to Mardykes Hall you will be relieved."

All this time Lady Haworth was getting on her things, with the careless hurry of a person about to fly for her life; and Lady Walsingham issued her orders for horses, and the general preparations for resuming the journey.

It was now between ten and eleven; but the servant who rode armed with them, according to the not unnecessary usage of the times, thought that with a little judicious bribing of postboys they might easily reach Mardykes Hall before three o'clock in the morning.

When the party set forward again, Lady Haworth was comparatively tranquil. She no longer heard the unearthly mimicry of her sister's voice; there remained only the fear and suspense which that illusion or visitation had produced.

Her sister, Lady Walsingham, after a brief effort to induce something like conversation, became silent. A thin sheet of snow had covered the darkened landscape, and some light flakes were still dropping. Lady Walsingham struck her repeater often in the dark, and inquired the distances frequently. She was anxious to get over the ground, though by no means fatigued. Something of the anxiety that lay heavy at her sister's heart had touched her own.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### *Perplexed*

The roads even then were good, and very good horses the posting-houses turned out; so that by dint of extra pay the rapid rate of travelling undertaken by the servant was fully accomplished in the first two or three stages.

While Lady Walsingham was continually striking her repeater in her ear, and as they neared their destination, growing in spite of herself more anxious, her sister's uneasiness showed itself in a less reserved way; for, cold as it was, with snowflakes actually dropping, Lady Haworth's head was perpetually out at the window, and when she drew it up, sitting again in her place, she would audibly express her alarms, and apply to her sister for consolation and confidence in her suspense.

Under its thin carpet of snow, the pretty village of Golden Friars looked strangely to their eyes. It had long been fast asleep, and both ladies were excited as they drew up at the steps of the George and Dragon, and with bell and knocker roused the slumbering household.

What tidings awaited them here? In a very few minutes the door was opened, and the porter staggered down, after a word with the driver, to the carriage-window, not half awake.

"Is Lady Mardykes well?" demanded Lady Walsingham.

"Is Sir Bale well?"

"Are all the people at Mardykes Hall quite well?"

With clasped hands Lady Haworth listened to the successive answers to these questions which her sister hastily put. The answers were all satisfactory. With a great sigh and a little laugh, Lady Walsingham placed her hand affectionately on that of her sister; who, saying, "God be thanked!" began to weep.

"When had you last news from Mardykes?" asked Lady Walsingham.

"A servant was down here about four o'clock."

"O! no one since?" said she in a disappointed tone.

No one had been from the great house since, but all were well then.

"They are early people, you know, dear; and it is dark at four, and that is as late as they could well have heard, and nothing could have happened since — very unlikely. We have come very fast; it is only a few minutes past two, darling."

But each felt the chill and load of their returning anxiety.

While the people at the George were rapidly getting a team of horses to, Lady Walsingham contrived a moment for an order from the other window to her servant, who knew Golden Friars perfectly, to knock-up the people at Doctor Torvey's, and to inquire whether all were well at Mardykes Hall.

There he learned that a messenger had come for Doctor Torvey at ten o'clock, and that the Doctor had not returned since. There was no news, however, of any one's being ill; and the Doctor himself did not know what he was wanted about. While Lady Haworth was talking to her maid from the window next the steps, Lady Walsingham was, unobserved, receiving this information at the other.

It made her very uncomfortable.

In a few minutes more, however, with a team of fresh horses, they were again rapidly passing the distance between them and Mardykes Hall.

About two miles on, their drivers pulled-up, and they heard a voice talking with them from the roadside. A servant from the Hall had been sent with a note for Lady Walsingham, and had been ordered, if necessary, to ride the whole way to the Three Nuns to deliver it. The note was already in Lady Walsingham's hand; her sister sat beside her, and with the corner of the open note in her fingers, she read it breathlessly at the same time by the light of a carriage-lamp which the man held to the window. It said:

My dearest love — my darling sister — dear sisters both! — in God's name, lose not a moment. I am so overpowered and *terrified*. I cannot explain; I can only implore of you to come with all the haste you can make. Waste no time, darlings. I hardly understand what I write. Only this, dear sisters; I feel that my reason will desert me, unless you come soon. You will not fail me now. Your poor distracted

JANET

The sisters exchanged a pale glance, and Lady Haworth grasped her sister's hand.

"Where is the messenger?" asked Lady Walsingham.

A mounted servant came to the window.

"Is any one ill at home?" she asked.

"No, all were well — my lady, and Sir Bale — no one sick."

"But the Doctor was sent for; what was that for?"

"I can't say, my lady."

"You are quite certain that no one — think — *no* one is ill?"

"There is no one ill at the Hall, my lady, that I have heard of."

"Is Lady Mardykes, my sister, still up?"

"Yes, my lady; and her maid is with her."

"And Sir Bale, are you certain he is quite well?"

"Sir Bale is quite well, my lady; he has been busy settling papers tonight, and was as well as usual."

“That will do, thanks,” said the perplexed lady; and to her own servant she added, “On to Mardykes Hall with all the speed they can make. I’ll pay them well, tell them.”

And in another minute they were gliding along the road at a pace which the muffled beating of the horses’ hoofs on the thin sheet of snow that covered the road showed to have broken out of the conventional trot, and to resemble something more like a gallop.

And now they were under the huge trees, that looked black as hearse-plumes in contrast with the snow. The cold gleam of the lake in the moon which had begun to shine out now met their gaze; and the familiar outline of Snakes Island, its solemn timber bleak and leafless, standing in a group, seemed to watch Mardykes Hall with a dismal observation across the water. Through the gate and between the huge files of trees the carriage seemed to fly; and at last the steaming horses stood panting, nodding and snorting, before the steps in the courtyard.

There was a light in an upper window, and a faint light in the hall, the door of which was opened; and an old servant came down and ushered the ladies into the house.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### *The Hour*

Lightly they stepped over the snow that lay upon the broad steps, and entering the door saw the dim figure of their sister, already in the large and faintly-lighted hall. One candle in the hand of her scared maid, and one burning on the table, leaving the distant parts of that great apartment in total darkness, touched the figures with the odd sharp lights in which Schalken delights; and a streak of chilly moonlight, through the open door, fell upon the floor, and was stretched like a white sheet at her feet. Lady Mardykes, with an exclamation of agitated relief, threw her arms, in turn, round the necks of her sisters, and hugging them, kissed them again and again, murmuring her thanks, calling them her "blessed sisters," and praising God for his mercy in having sent them to her in time, and altogether in a rapture of agitation and gratitude.

Taking them each by a hand, she led them into a large room, on whose panels they could see the faint twinkle of the tall gilded frames, and the darker indication of the old portraits, in which that interesting house abounds. The moonbeams, entering obliquely through the Tudor stone-shafts of the window and thrown upon the floor, reflected an imperfect light; and the candle which the maid who followed her mistress held in her hand shone dimly from the sideboard, where she placed it. Lady Mardykes told her that she need not wait.

"They don't know; they know only that we are in some great confusion; but — God have mercy on me! — nothing of the reality. Sit down, darlings; you are tired."

She sat down between them on a sofa, holding a hand of each. They sat opposite the window, through which appeared the magnificent view commanded from the front of the house: in the foreground the solemn trees of Snakes Island, one great branch stretching upward, bare and moveless, from the side, like an arm raised to heaven in wonder or in menace towards the house; the lake, in part swept by the icy splendour of the moon, trembling with a dazzling glimmer, and farther off lost in blackness; the Fells rising from a base of gloom, into ribs and peaks white with snow, and looking against the pale sky, thin and transparent as a haze. Right across to the storied woods of Cloostedd, and the old domains of the Feltrams, this view extended.

Thus alone, their mufflers still on, their hands clasped in hers, they breathlessly listened to her strange tale.

Connectedly told it amounted to this: Sir Bale seemed to have been relieved of some great anxiety about the time when, ten days before, he had told her to invite her friends to Mardykes Hall. This morning he had gone out for a walk with Trevor, his under-steward, to talk over some plans about thinning the woods at this side; and also to discuss practically a proposal, lately made by a wealthy merchant, to take a very long lease, on advantageous terms to Sir Bale as he thought, of the old park and chase of Cloostedd, with the intention of building there, and making it once more a handsome residence.

In the improved state of his spirits, Sir Bale had taken a shrewd interest in this negotiation; and was actually persuaded to cross the lake that morning with his adviser, and to walk over the grounds with him.

Sir Bale had seemed unusually well, and talked with great animation. He was more like a young man who had just attained his majority, and for the first time grasped his estates, than the grim elderly Baronet who had been moping about Mardykes, and as much afraid as a cat of the water, for so many years.

As they were returning toward the boat, at the roots of that same scathed elm whose barkless bough had seemed, in his former visit to this old wood, to beckon him from a distance, like a skeleton arm, to enter the forest, he and his companion on a sudden missed an old map of the grounds which they had been consulting.

"We must have left it in the corner tower of Cloostedd House, which commands that view of the grounds, you remember; it would not do to lose it. It is the most accurate thing we have. I'll sit down here and rest a little till you come back."

The man was absent little more than twenty minutes. When he returned, he found that Sir Bale had changed his position, and was now walking to and fro, around and about, in what, at a distance, he fancied was mere impatience, on the open space a couple of hundred paces nearer to the turn in the valley towards the boat. It was not impatience. He was agitated. He looked pale, and he took his companion's arm — a thing he had never thought of doing before — and said, "Let us away quickly. I've something to tell at home, — and I forgot it."

Not another word did Sir Bale exchange with his companion. He sat in the stern of the boat, gloomy as a man about to glide under traitor's-gate. He entered his house in the same sombre and agitated state. He entered his library, and sat for a long time as if stunned.

At last he seemed to have made-up his mind to something; and applied himself quietly and diligently to arranging papers, and docketing some and burning others. Dinner-time arrived. He sent to tell Lady Mardykes that he should not join her at dinner, but would see her afterwards.

"It was between eight and nine," she continued, "I forget the exact time, when he came to the tower drawingroom where I was. I did not hear his approach. There is a stone stair, with a thick carpet on it. He told me he wished to speak to me there. It is an out-of-the-way place — a small old room with very thick walls, and there is a double door, the inner one of oak — I suppose he wished to guard against being overheard.

"There was a look in his face that frightened me; I saw he had something dreadful to tell. He looked like a man on whom a lot had fallen to put some one to death," said Lady Mardykes. "O, my poor Bale! my husband, my husband! he knew what it would be to me."

Here she broke into the wildest weeping, and it was some time before she resumed.

"He seemed very kind and very calm," she said at last; "he said but little; and, I think, these were his words: 'I find, Janet, I have made a great miscalculation — I thought my hour of danger had passed. We have been many years together, but a parting must sooner or later be, and my time has come.'



"I don't know what I said. I would not have so much minded — for I could not have believed, if I had not seen him — but there was that in his look and tone which no one could doubt.

"I shall die before tomorrow morning," he said. "You must command yourself, Janet; it can't be altered now."

"O, Bale," I cried nearly distracted, "you would not kill yourself!"

"Kill myself! poor child! no, indeed," he said; "it is simply that I shall die. No violent death — nothing but the common subsidence of life — I have made up my mind; what happens to everybody can't be so very bad; and millions of worse men than I die every year. You must not follow me to my room, darling; I shall see you by and by."

"His language was collected and even cold; but his face looked as if it was cut in stone; you never saw, in a dream, a face like it."

Lady Walsingham here said, "I am certain he is ill; he's in a fever. You must not distract and torture yourself about his predictions. You sent for Doctor Torvey; what did he say?"

"I could not tell him all."

"O, no; I don't mean that; they'd only say he was mad, and we little better for minding what he says. But did the Doctor see him? and what did he say of his health?"

"Yes; he says there is nothing wrong — no fever — nothing whatever. Poor Bale has been so kind; he saw him to please me," she sobbed again wildly. "I wrote to implore of him. It was my last hope, strange as it seems; and O, would to God I could think it! But there is nothing of that kind. Wait till you have seen him. There is a frightful calmness about all he says and does; and his directions are all so clear, and his mind so perfectly collected, it is quite impossible."

And poor Lady Mardykes again burst into a frantic agony of tears.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *Sir Bale in the Gallery*

"Now, Janet darling, you are yourself low and nervous, and you treat this fancy of Bale's as seriously as he does himself. The truth is, he is a hypochondriac, as the doctors say; and you will find that I am right; he will be quite well in the morning, and I daresay a little ashamed of himself for having frightened his poor little wife as he has. I will sit up with you. But our poor Mary is not, you know, very strong; and she ought to lie down and rest a little. Suppose you give me a cup of tea in the drawingroom. I will run up to my room and get these things off, and meet you in the drawingroom; or, if you like it better, you can sit with me in my own room; and for goodness' sake let us have candles enough and a bright fire; and I promise you, if you will only exert your own good sense, you shall be a great deal more cheerful in a very little time."

Lady Walsingham's address was kind and cheery, and her air confident. For a moment a ray of hope returned, and her sister Janet acknowledged at least the possibility of her theory. But if confidence is contagious, so also is panic; and Lady Walsingham experienced a sinking of the heart which she dared not confess to her sister, and vainly strove to combat.

Lady Walsingham went up with her sister Mary, and having seen her in her room, and spoken again to her in the same cheery tone in which she had lectured her sister Lady Mardykes, she went on; and having taken possession of her own room, and put off her cloaks and shawls, she was going downstairs again, when she heard Sir Bale's voice, as he approached along the gallery, issuing orders to a servant, as it seemed, exactly in his usual tone.

She turned, with a strange throb at her heart, and met him.

A little sterner, a little paler than usual he looked; she could perceive no other change. He took her hand kindly and held it, as with dilated eyes he looked with a dark inquiry for a moment in her face. He signed to the servant to go on, and said, "I'm glad you have come, Maud. You have heard what is to happen; and I don't know how Janet could have borne it without your support. You did right to come; and you'll stay with her for a day or two, and take her away from this place as soon as you can."

She looked at him with the embarrassment of fear. He was speaking to her with the calmness of a leavetaking in the pressroom — the serenity that overlies the greatest awe and agony of which human nature is capable.

"I am glad to see you, Bale," she began, hardly knowing what she said, and she stopped short.

"You are come, it turns out, on a sad mission," he resumed; "you find all about to change. Poor Janet! it is a blow to her. I shall not live to see tomorrow's sun."

"Come," she said, startled, "you must not talk so. No, Bale, you have no right to speak so; you can have no reason to justify it. It is cruel and wicked to trifle with your wife's feelings. If you are under a delusion, you must make an effort and shake it off, or, at least, cease to talk of it. You are not well; I know by your looks you are ill; but I am very certain we shall see you much better by tomorrow, and still better the day following."

"No, I'm not ill, sister. Feel that pulse, if you doubt me; there is no fever in it. I never was more perfectly in health; and yet I know that before the clock, that has just struck three, shall have struck five, I, who am talking to you, shall be dead."

Lady Walsingham was frightened, and her fear irritated her.

"I have told you what I think and believe," she said vehemently. "I think it wrong and cowardly of you to torture my poor sister with your whimsical predictions. Look into your own mind, and you will see you have absolutely no reason to support what you say. How *can* you inflict all this agony upon a poor creature foolish enough to love you as she does, and weak enough to believe in your idle dreams?"

"Stay, sister; it is not a matter to be debated so. If tomorrow I can hear you, it will be time enough to upbraid me. Pray return now to your sister; she needs all you can do for her. She is much to be pitied; her sufferings afflict me. I shall see you and her again before my death. It would have been more cruel to leave her unprepared. Do all in your power to nerve and tranquillise her. What is past cannot now be helped."

He paused, looking hard at her, as if he had half made up his mind to say something more. But if there was a question of the kind, it was determined in favour of silence.

He dropped her hand, turned quickly, and left her.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### *Dr. Torvey's Opinion*

When Lady Walsingham reached the head of the stairs, she met her maid, and from her learned that her sister, Lady Mardykes, was downstairs in the same room. On approaching, she heard her sister Mary's voice talking with her, and found them together. Mary, finding that she could not sleep, had put on her clothes again, and come down to keep her sister company. The room looked more comfortable now. There were candles lighted, and a good fire burnt in the grate; teathings stood on a little table near the fire, and the two sisters were talking, Lady Mardykes appearing more collected, and only they two in the room.

"Have you seen him, Maud?" cried Lady Mardykes, rising and hastily approaching her the moment she entered.

"Yes, dear; and talked with him, and — —"

"Well?"

"And I think very much as I did before. I think he is nervous, he says he is not ill; but he is nervous and whimsical, and as men always are when they happen to be out of sorts, very positive; and of course the only thing that can quite undeceive him is the lapse of the time he has fixed for his prediction, as it is sure to pass without any tragic result of any sort. We shall then all see alike the nature of his delusion."

"O, Maud, if I were only sure you thought so! if I were sure you really had hopes! Tell me, Maud, for God's sake, what you really think."

Lady Walsingham was a little disconcerted by the unexpected directness of her appeal.

"Come, darling, you must not be foolish," she said; "we can only talk of impressions, and we are imposed upon by the solemnity of his manner, and the fact that he evidently believes in his own delusion; every one does believe in his own delusion — there is nothing strange in that."

"O, Maud, I see you are not convinced; you are only trying to comfort me. You have no hope — none, none, none!" and she covered her face with her hands, and wept again convulsively.

Lady Walsingham was silent for a moment, and then with an effort said, as she placed her hand on her sister's arm, "You see, dear Janet, there is no use in my saying the same thing over and over again; an hour or two will show who is right. Sit down again, and be like yourself. My maid told me that you had sent to the parlour for Doctor Torvey; he must not find you so. What would he think? Unless you mean to tell him of Bale's strange fancy; and a pretty story that would be to set afloat in Golden Friars. I think I hear him coming."

So, in effect, he was. Doctor Torvey — with the florid gravity of a man who, having just swallowed a bottle of port, besides some glasses of sherry, is admitted to the presence of ladies whom he respects — entered the room, made what he called his "leg and his compliments," and awaited the ladies' commands.

"Sit down, Doctor Torvey," said Lady Walsingham, who in the incapacity of her sister undertook the doing of the honours. "My sister, Lady Mardykes, has got it into her head somehow that Sir Bale is ill. I have been speaking to him; he certainly does not look very well, but he says he is quite well. Do you think him well? — that is, we know you don't think there is anything of importance amiss — but she wishes to know whether you think him *perfectly* well."

The Doctor cleared his voice and delivered his lecture, a little thickly at some words, upon Sir Bale's case; the result of which was that it was no case at all; and that if he would only live something more of a country gentleman's life, he would be as well as any man could desire — as well as any man, gentle or simple, in the country.

"The utmost I should think of doing for him would be, perhaps, a little quinine, nothing mo' — shurely — he is really and toory a very shoun' shtay of health."

Lady Walsingham looked encouragingly at her sister and nodded.

"I've been shen' for, La'y Walsh — Walse — Walsing — *ham*; old Jack Amerald — he licks his glass o' port," he said roughly, "and shuvversh accord'n'ly," he continued, with a compassionating paddle of his right hand; "one of thoshe aw — odd feels in his stomach; and as I have pretty well done all I can man-n'ge down here, I must be off, ye shee. Wind up from Golden Friars, and a little flutter ovv zhnov, thazh all;" and with some remarks about the extreme cold of the weather, and the severity of their night journey, and many respectful and polite parting speeches, the Doctor took his leave; and they soon heard the wheels of his gig and the tread of his horse, faint and muffled from the snow in the courtyard, and the Doctor, who had connected that melancholy and agitated household with the outer circle of humanity, was gone.

There was very little snow falling, half-a-dozen flakes now and again, and their flight across the window showed, as the Doctor had in a manner boasted, that the wind was in his face as he returned to Golden Friars. Even these desultory snowflakes ceased, at times, altogether; and returning, as they say, "by fits and starts," left for long intervals the landscape, under the brilliant light of the moon, in its wide white shroud. The curtain of the great window had not been drawn. It seemed to Lady Walsingham that the moonbeams had grown more dazzling, that Snakes Island was nearer and more distinct, and the outstretched arm of the old tree looked bigger and angrier, like the uplifted arm of an assassin, who draws silently nearer as the catastrophe approaches.

Cold, dazzling, almost repulsive in this intense moonlight and white sheeting, the familiar landscape looked in the eyes of Lady Walsingham. The sisters gradually grew more and more silent, an unearthly suspense overhung them all, and Lady Mardykes rose every now and then and listened at the open door for step or voice in vain. They all were overpowered by the intenser horror that seemed gathering around them. And thus an hour or more passed.

## CHAPTER XXX

### *Hush!*

Pale and silent those three beautiful sisters sat. The horrible quietude of a suspense that had grown all but insupportable oppressed the guests of Lady Mardykes, and something like the numbness of despair had reduced her to silence, the dreadful counterfeit of peace.

Sir Bale Mardykes on a sudden softly entered the room. Reflected from the floor near the window, the white moonlight somehow gave to his fixed features the character of a smile. With a warning gesture, as he came in, he placed his finger to his lips, as if to enjoin silence; and then, having successively pressed the hands of his two sisters-in-law, he stooped over his almost fainting wife, and twice pressed her cold forehead with his lips; and so, without a word, he went softly from the room.

Some seconds elapsed before Lady Walsingham, recovering her presence of mind, with one of the candlesticks from the table in her hand, opened the door and followed.

She saw Sir Bale mount the last stair of the broad flight visible from the hall, and candle in hand turn the corner of the massive banister, and as the light thrown from his candle showed, he continued, without hurry, to ascend the second flight.

With the irrepressible curiosity of horror she continued to follow him at a distance.

She saw him enter his own private room, and close the door.

Continuing to follow she placed herself noiselessly at the door of the apartment, and in breathless silence, with a throbbing heart, listened for what should pass.

She distinctly heard Sir Bale pace the floor up and down for some time, and then, after a pause, a sound as if some one had thrown himself heavily on the bed. A silence followed, during which her sisters, who had followed more timidly, joined her. She warned them with a look and gesture to be silent.

Lady Haworth stood a little behind, her white lips moving, and her hands clasped in a silent agony of prayer. Lady Mardykes leaned against the massive oak door-case.

With her hand raised to her ear, and her lips parted, Lady Walsingham listened for some seconds — for a minute, two minutes, three. At last, losing heart, she seized the handle in her panic, and turned it sharply. The door was locked on the inside, but some one close to it said from within, “Hush, hush!”

Much alarmed now, the same lady knocked violently at the door. No answer was returned.

She knocked again more violently, and shook the door with all her fragile force. It was something of horror in her countenance as she did so, that, no doubt, terrified Lady Mardykes, who with a loud and long scream sank in a swoon upon the floor.

The servants, alarmed by these sounds, were speedily in the gallery. Lady Mardykes was carried to her room, and laid upon her bed; her sister, Lady Haworth, accompanying her. In the meantime the door was forced. Sir Bale Mardykes was found stretched upon his bed.

Those who have once seen it, will not mistake the aspect of death. Here, in Sir Bale Mardykes’ room, in his bed, in his clothes, is a stranger, grim and awful; in a few days to be insupportable, and to pass alone into the prison-house, and to be seen no more.

Where is Sir Bale Mardykes now, whose roof-tree and whose place at board and bed will know him no more? Here lies a chapfallen, fish-eyed image, chilling already into clay, and stiffening in every joint.

There is a marble monument in the pretty church of Golden Friars. It stands at the left side of what antiquarians call “the high altar.” Two pillars at each end support an arch with several armorial bearings on as many shields sculptured above. Beneath, on a marble flooring raised some four feet, with a cornice round, lies Sir Bale Mardykes, of Mardykes Hall, ninth Baronet of that ancient family, chiseled in marble with knee-breeches and buckled-shoes, and *ails de pigeon*, and single-breasted coat and long waistcoat, ruffles and sword, such as gentlemen wore about the year 1770, and bearing a strong resemblance to the features of the second Charles. On the broad marble which forms the background is inscribed an epitaph, which has perpetuated to our times the estimate formed by his “inconsolable widow,” the Dowager Lady Mardykes, of the virtues and accomplishments of her deceased lord.

Lady Walsingham would have qualified two or three of the more highly-coloured hyperboles, at which the Golden Friars of those days sniffed and tittered. They don’t signify now; there is no contemporary left to laugh or whisper. And if there be not much that is true in the letter of that inscription, it at least perpetuates something that *is* true — that wonderful glorification of partisanship, the affection of an idolising wife.

Lady Mardykes, a few days after the funeral, left Mardykes Hall for ever. She lived a great deal with her sister, Lady Walsingham; and died, as a line cut at the foot of Sir Bale Mardykes’ epitaph records, in the year 1790; her remains being laid beside those of her beloved husband in Golden Friars.

The estates had come to Sir Bale Mardykes free of entail. He had been pottering over a will, but it was never completed, nor even quite planned; and after much doubt and scrutiny, it was at last ascertained that, in default of a will and of issue, a clause in the marriage-settlement gave the entire estates to the Dowager Lady Mardykes.

By her will she bequeathed the estates to “her cousin, also a kinsman of the late Sir Bale Mardykes her husband,” William Feltram, on condition of his assuming the name and arms of Mardykes, the arms of Feltram being quartered in the shield.

Thus was oddly fulfilled the prediction which Philip Feltram had repeated, that the estates of Mardykes were to pass into the hands of a Feltram.

About the year 1795 the baronetage was revived, and William Feltram enjoyed the title for fifteen years, as Sir William Mardykes.

# THE BIRD OF PASSAGE: A 1<sup>ST</sup> LOVE

## CHAPTER I.

### A VOICE AND NOTHING MORE.

EVERY one knows Golden Friars — that quaint old village of gray stone gables, under the shadow of dark elms that grow in little groups of twos and threes, standing by the margin of a lake which is built round with an amphitheatre of the grandest mountain.

Westward of this beautiful scene — so wooded, solemn, solitary — the aspect of the country changes gradually; and about twelve miles away from that little town, you find yourself in a region strangely different. It is monotonous, bleak, and repulsive, with the peculiar melancholy and ugliness that characterize a “moss.”

Dardale Moss is said to be twelve miles long, and, in some places, seven miles broad. It is a wide, black level, with only here and there a break or a hillock, or a tuft of furze, or a little screen of osiers, to vary the stretch of peat and quagmire.

The arable and pasture land, by which this dank expanse is encompassed as by a shore, throws out long promontories, or recedes into mimic bays. Patches of dwarf oak and hazel, and graceful groups of the silver-stemmed birch, irregularly fringe its edges, or gather thickly on the natural moles and causeways that throw their arms into the wide morass.

This sylvan skirting, and the irregular ascent of the ground immediately surrounding the moss, redeem its ugliness, and render many of its recesses positively picturesque.

The moon had risen over that black expanse, full ten miles long and eight broad, which is well known in one of our northern English counties, as I have said, as Dardale Moss.

The lonely young Squire of Hazelden was striding from tussock to tussock over its treacherous surface, homeward, his gun over his shoulder. There is not a living soul of his kith and kin in that home, for which, nevertheless, he feels a kindly attachment as he draws nearer. Excepting a few scattered boors and peasants, there is not a human being living within five miles of Haworth House. “So much the better,” thinks the Squire, a little bitterly, for he is poor and proud.

The Squire that day had encountered but one adventure, which, except in the solitude of that region, would have been none at all. Before the storm had got up, as the sun was setting beyond the low horizon of the wide, flat moss, he heard not far from him, issuing from the thickets of the wood that there skirted the moor, a voice with whose sweetness the melancholy of the western light and tinted woods accorded; it rose so clear and sad, that he stopped to listen as it sang these words:

“The hawthorn tree Is dear to me,  
The elver-stone likewise,  
The lonely air That lingers there,  
And thought that never dies.

“In evening glow  
The May will blow,  
The stone a shadow cast —  
And stone and tree  
A bield will be  
As in the summers past.

“And words as dear  
Will others hear  
Beneath the hawthorn tree,  
In leafy May At fall of day,  
Where I no more shall be.”

The long note died away as the last beam of the setting sun lighted the autumnal boughs of the wood, and silence and twilight came together. For some seconds he paused, enchanted; and then, curious to discover the minstrel whose music had moved him so strangely, he strode into the wood, and paced its rugged banks and hollows in a vain search.

After this he sat down for a while upon a rock, musing upon this song, which had left a vague tenderness in his mind; and I am almost ashamed to say that by the time he had recovered his lost ground, and resumed his homeward route, the moon had risen, and a high chill wind had begun to blow.

It is late in autumn now, and this prematurely wintry wind is sweeping the melancholy moor; the scud is drifting wildly across the moon, and the irregular groups of thorn and stunted oak and birch that gather near the edge of the wide moss are tossing their arms in an eerie ecstasy, as if beckoning the bogles and dobbies across that desolate expanse.

William Haworth, the Squire of Hazelden, is a tall, active fellow, with a face that is gentle and manly, and light-brown hair and blue eyes — a Saxon supported by genealogy, for an ancestor of his fought at Hastings for Harold against the Norman.

Did ever young fellow lead so solitary a life? It has made him, perhaps, something of an enthusiast and a dreamer. It has not, however, impaired his energy. In this wild solitude he has passions, plans, and pride enough to find him work. His life is by no means idle or unambitious.

Striking swiftly towards his home among the bending trees, in the sweep of the cold wind, he found himself on a sudden before the Druidic ring of cyclopean stones, a relic of prehistoric times, for which among antiquarians that lonely place is famous. White, tall, and worn — they stood in the moonlight, which, checkered by the flying scud, passed over them with swift alternations.

Light and shadow flew on and on before him over the grass, in rapid pulsations, and the old stones alternately gleamed in dazzling light and sank in darkness. For the scud was driving across the moon, and the flying shadows rolled as if the sward itself was driving in ceaseless undulations beneath his feet and through those cyclopean columns.

Standing against one of these stones was a human form. To one who well knew the solitude of that neighborhood the appearing of living man or woman at that hour, in such a place, was a wonder.

The wind was cold and wild. The figure was that of a tall slender woman with a cloak on, the hood of which was over her head. She was leaning lightly with her shoulder against the timeworn stone that rose from the grass high above her, and a solitary thorn-tree at her side was bending and tossing in the storm, in which also such comers of her cloak as she had not gathered close about her were flapping and quivering.

As William Haworth drew near she turned her head for a moment, and seemed to look toward him. She took no further notice of his approach, and appeared serenely indifferent alike about him and the storm.

The Squire had nothing of the leaven of the man of the world in him except ambition. He was the son of solitude and thought. He had his castles in the air, but spared not himself to make them one day real. Thus the romance and shyness of earlier youth remained with him, although his pride would have declined to confess either.

"I beg pardon — but surely you won't stay there; it is quite awful, and the night is growing wilder."

There was no answer.

"And it is so cold — miserably," he added.

"I am on a journey, sir," said a clear low voice, and the cloak did not move.

"Well, but you can't do without shelter, and the nearest is miles away, except my house; there are dangerous places, too, about this moss, and people have been lost in it. If you have no objection, good old Mrs. Gillyflower will make you comfortable for the night, and you are very welcome. The house is mine, and I am going home. She will be very glad to see you — pray, don't think of staying here."

"You are a man that is kind to the poor — you would wish to see them better," said the same voice, very silvery and civil, with no suspicion of the mendicant's whine in it, or of the uncouth dialect and intonation of those northern regions. It was the tone of a person whose opinion was of value, and who had a right to give it.

"It matters little what I am, provided I speak truth; this is neither hour nor weather for making a journey on foot, and the storm grows worse."

"It is past seven o'clock?" said the mantle.

"Nearer eight; it was seven when I passed the cat-stone at Elverden, and that is three miles away."

"Well, then, I will go — thank you, sir," said this voice, that he thought so sweet; and she made a little step forward and stopped, to intimate that she was ready to go when he should lead the way.

It is not always easy to say from what our impressions are gathered: perhaps it was something in the shape and bearing, no less than in the sweet and fearless tone of the female in the cloak, that resembles the grace of a princess who accepts a right, with a secret consciousness that in so doing she confers a distinction.

Men who live alone, if they are more reserved, are also simpler than their brethren who rough it, and revel in the inns and highways of life.

"Thank you very much," said he, very respectfully; and they walked together towards Haworth House, which stands close by.

Passing by moss-gray rocks, and tossing broom and bramble, and groups of birch and oak, over a very uneven sward, which she trod with a step as light and stately as a deer's, they moved side by side.

He longed to speak to her, but something restrained him, and never a word said she.

And now before them rises the strong old house of Haworth, built of gray stone, with a shingle roof and small windows; and the shadows of the ancient elms that toss and nod about it are sharp on the walls, or blurred, as the uncertain moonlight changes.

The hall-door has a great oldfashioned latch, and standing together under the stone porch the Squire essayed to open his door and give his guest welcome, but the bolts were drawn and all secure. Then he hammered at the door with the knocker, and then whacked the old oak more lustily with the butt of his gun.

"I'm so sorry the storm prevents their hearing," said he, a little ashamed of his hospitality.

Perhaps old Martha Gillyflower thought he had outstayed the due hour of return, and intended a hint to that effect.

"I'll call them, at the windows," said he. And running round the corner and to the far window, which is that one of the three kitchen-windows which looks from the side of the house, and having there summoned the garrison effectually, he returned to the porch before the hall-door was opened.

## CHAPTER II.

### HAWORTH HALL.

GOOD MRS. GILLYFLOWER was the Squire's housekeeper. Mall Darrell was a wiry girl — a "hobble-de-hoy," with a check bedgown, bare arms, and a rubber that had plainly touched the pots always in her hand, and one shoulder something higher than the other; arid Mall constituted the household whom Mrs. Gillyflower chiefly commanded. There was, besides, Peter Clinton — a thick fellow in barragan jacket, and trousers always clayey about the knees; for he was gardener as well as groom, and outdoor factotum. Tom's thumbs looked as if they had been beaten broad long ago on an anvil, and his nails and hands were always grimed with garden-mould, and he lived in two rooms that were somewhere among the stables.

The hall-door, being unbarred, opened with a swoop that carried Mall Darrell, who did the office of portress, against the wall, and made the candle, prudently held a long way off in Martha Gillyflower's hand, flare with a great agitation.

"Come in, please," said William Haworth.

And the stranger in the cloak, fluttering in the breeze, stepped into the hall; and William got his stalwart shoulder to the old oak-door, and forced it, with a struggle, into its place, and there was an instantaneous calm; and the candle-flame was serene, and lighted stout old Martha's face till every wrinkle was marked, and every pucker stood out like those of a burgomaster's wife in a Dutch portrait.

When Mrs. Gillyflower beheld the stranger, her voluble welcome and remonstrance just commenced was suspended, and her lips closed. With her chin in the air, and the corners of her mouth depressed, she eyed the tall stranger askance, with a jealousy that bordered on dignified scorn.

Without removing her hood, the tall slender form in the dark cloak glanced quickly, this way and that, over her shoulder, and from under that hood William Haworth had just a shadowy glimpse of an oval face and a splendid pair of eyes.

It was but momentary and obscure, for now she was looking straight at the housekeeper, and the Squire could see again but the *tournure* of the draped figure.

"Martha — I say, Mrs. Gillyflower — pray attend to me. I wish you to make this" (how was he to style her?) — "this lady as comfortable as you can. There's a fire, of course — and tea — and — and supper. And she is making a journey; and she'll pass tonight under your care; and — and treat her hospitably and kindly, if you please."

The young Squire said this with an effort of self-assertion, for he was extremely embarrassed by old Martha's fixed and severe glance, which she had transferred from the unknown to him.

He felt indescribably disconcerted — he felt that he was looking "put out;" and his pride resented the contrast which it recognized in his guest, who stood there looking at the old woman with an air as serene as that of a princess who has taken the veil.

"Certainly, sir — you're master here," said the old servant, dryly; and making a short courtesy, that was rather a snub than a civility, to the stranger, she led the way to the kitchen.

He watched his guest as she walked down the tiled passage, and then he turned and entered his study.

The rooms in that house are not stately — very much the reverse; they are very low, and not very large. Here was one hardly fourteen feet square, wainscoted round with oak, with two narrow windows, curtained with thick red stuff, discolored by time, and with a threadbare carpet, much too small for the floor.

But it is an extremely cosy room notwithstanding. It has a huge old-fashioned hearth, in which was then burning a cheery fire of mingled peat, wood, and coals, lighting it all up merrily. Right opposite, ticked from the wainscot that homeliest and snuggest of inelegant articles — a Dutch clock, near to which hung his trout and pike rods» his landing-net and gaff, an old silver-mounted pair of family horse-pistols, and a duck-gun; all round the room were fixed the antlers of deer — ancient decorations transferred from the hall; and the studious pretensions of the young man were vouched for by a few shelves, as rude as the other furniture of the room, from which his books showed their well-worn backs. All the furniture was clumsy and out of date, and before the fire stood a table hardly compatible with romance, on which were teathings, bread, butter, and a red round of beef; while a brass kettle sang pleasantly from the bars.

"I do hope old Martha is really making her comfortable. I wonder who she is? If she is a lady, she does not choose to be recognized as such — that is plain. She will know, of course, that I could not have asked her, having no lady to receive her, into these sitting-rooms." He glanced round, and smiled as he thought the dignified phrase, for he did not actually speak it. "Well — yes; I may be better yet — finery, wealth; never so snug again, though."

I wonder whether moments ever came in which our liberated friend Robinson Crusoe regretted his cave, with its rude furniture, its chests and his hammock, and his harmless comrades the dog and the parrot, and dismissed the tranquil image with a sigh.

"I'll make no difference: I'll go to the kitchen at my usual hour, and smoke my ten minutes by the chimney; but I don't think old Martha would like to disgrace Haworth by neglecting a guest."

The young Squire was hungry; he ate heartily. And then he sat before the fire; and the thought of the beautiful figure in the dark mantle was with him still.

## CHAPTER III.

### A BATTLE WITHOUT RESULTS.

WILLIAM HAWORTH had poked the fire only twice, when a sharp knock at the door announced Mrs. Gillyflower. She closed the door, having stumped in, clearing her voice, not to lose time as she did so, in such hot haste to speak was she; and she made a halt, and a "right-face," and a courtesy.

William was very fond of old Martha, and a little henpecked by her. Her air and look embarrassed him; he was in an unpleasant suspense, and had only time to say, "Well, Martha?"

"I'm come, sir, to gie ye warning; I'll leave you this day month, or any day sooner ye please. I a' been lang enough in Haworth House. I shouldn't ken the aid place, wi' the changes that's like to be."

"Why, what do you mean, Martha? — what have I done?" said the Squire, standing up and opening his hands in expostulation.

"What a' ye done, Master Willie? Well, I think when ye bring in a young fool o' a lass like that — a young lady, I believe I'm to call her — Lady, indeed! Cow-lady (ladybird) off the moss, more like — bring her in, I say, by the hand—"

"I did not bring her in by the hand," replied William, indignantly.

"And what has that to do wi' the matter, Master Willie? What does it signify, sir? Not that bit o' stick that's burning in the peat, there. But whether ye brought her in by the hand or no, it's plain ye should put her out by the lug."

"Why, what the devil has she been doing?" demanded William, firing up with a stamp on the floor.

"I don't say she's been doin' nout, did I? All I say's this — and queer crack-brain'd work it is! — how does you and me know who or what she is? I won't make a butt o' such folk for no one; catter-waulin' over the moss wi' her company-keeper, mayhap — and a brave gowk they've made o' you — and I'm vexed to think you'd be so dafy. Ye usedn't to du a that lids, Master Willie — and what will the nebbers consait? — and what will the nebbers say?"

"Neighbors, indeed! I'd like to know where the neighbors are; and I give them all leave, when you can find them, to say what they please. I tell you, Martha, with your nonsense, you are enough to ruin the character of fifty men." And as he said this, indignantly looking on her consequential face and dumpy person, his own speech was on a sudden so very near upsetting him, that he turned abruptly, and I think his shoulders shook a little.

"Listen to me," he said, turning again, with a countenance graver than ever; "and perhaps, once for all, you'll hear reason. Returning home, only three minutes before I knocked at the kitchen-window, I saw this young woman — I suppose she's young, as you say so; I'm sure I don't know — standing alone in the storm, at the Mickle Steans. I suppose the poor creature meant to pass the night there. Would it have been creditable to Haworth House, and the old name, and to you as housekeeper, if I had passed her by, and left her in the mirk and storm — to be found dead, perhaps, in the morning, within ten-score steps of our door? Do you really mean to say that, in the name of virtue, I should have left her, the young woman as you call her, in a storm like this — do you hear the windows? do you hear the noise? — without a bield to shelter her, and perhaps to be smooored in the moss? I hope there's hardly such a monster on earth."

"Well, you know. Don't ye be in such a hurry. How could I know? and if, as you say, 'twas so near the door, and the night being so — I'll no deny. But ye ought to be prudent, Master Willie; ye're the head o' a house now, mind, and ye'll be looked to for example; and the apostle says — there's a waster on yon can'le — 'ye must not avoid evil only, but the appearance thereof.' And I suppose she'll no' be puttin' her staff here, and she'll be gangin' in the morning; and 'twas very unfortunate the thing should have happened so, but being as you say, I suppose it just couldn't be helped, ye'll no' be makin' a custom of it, and that's all we can say about it, if we were to talk till doomsday."

Had the guest of Haworth Hall been short and crooked, pitted with the smallpox, and blind of an eye, this debate upon eternal principles would, I daresay, have been spared: Mrs. Gillyflower would not have had a word to say in favor of exposing young women, for whole nights together, to storms in the dark; and the ancient rites of hospitality would not have found, perhaps, quite so passionate a vindicator William Haworth.

If feminine beauty be, in general, a letter of recommendation, it is also, with the gentler sex, a challenge and an alarm. It is only a different acknowledgment of the power of the talisman.

He laughed to himself, as he poked the fire for the third time. "Certainly it is high time I should stand up for my rights a little. Good old Martha would tread down my prerogative to something very small indeed, if I allowed her to bully me as she seems to wish; in that I suppose they are all pretty much alike, but who is there like her in everything else? I could not live in this place if she went away, and she could not live away from it; she's the last of the old people here, and she's such an old darling! I hope, I'm sure," he suddenly thought, "she'll give her breakfast in the morning."



## CHAPTER IV.

### SMOKE.

Now, it was a custom of our recluse Squire, every night at a quarter to ten (for which important hour he used punctually to set the "alarum" of his Dutch clock), to shut his book, take his pipe, and pay old Martha a visit in the kitchen, and have a talk with her as he smoked his churchwarden up the capacious chimney.

At that hour Mall's scrubbing and scouring for the day was over, and good Mrs. Gillyflower's labors of direction had come to an end; and the kitchen was tranquil, and the "housekeeper" disposed to chat a little before she betook herself to her bed.

The shrilly ring of the clock suddenly startled William from his book — it was a quarter to ten.

"Yes, my smoke. No, I'll *not* smoke here. I don't see why I shouldn't take my pipe to the kitchen, as usual, and have a look at her. I will."

And accordingly he popped his homely canister of tobacco into his pocket, and with his pipe in his fingers, and a candlestick in the other hand (for the hall of Haworth boasted no light), he set out on an exploration unusually interesting.

As he entered the tiled passage he heard such sounds of merriment from the kitchen as had not enlivened Haworth Hall for many a day. The sound of laughter is not only cheery to listen to, but it excites a sympathetic merriment in the hearers; and alone as he was, and utterly ignorant of the fun that provoked it, William laughed quietly in unison, in spite of himself.

The laughter which echoed from the kitchen was that of hale old Martha, and the young clear cackination of Mall Darrell; and between these peals he heard a low sweet voice narrating the story that, no doubt, stimulated all the mirth.

He could not find it in his heart to risk its interruption, and he waited, enjoying a sympathetic laugh, every time the merriment grew wild in the kitchen, until the story was plainly ended, and old Mrs. Gillyflower and Mall with great hilarity began to talk together. When this had a little subsided, William, with his pipe in one hand and his candle in the other, entered the snug old kitchen.

His guest was standing in the attitude in which she may have recounted her story, with one hand on the tall back of the chair, and an indescribable grace, and even dignity, in her pose. He thought he had never seen so beautiful and singular a creature.

There was no vulgar flurry or fidget; she simply awaited his notice, if he chose to give it, with a serene self-possession.

Perhaps I shall best describe the points that struck him in the stranger, by transcribing a little pencil-note he made in his study, an hour later, in meditative idleness, to aid his memory in making a sketch. It is as follows:

"Black hair — very black; low forehead; small head, beautifully set on; large brilliant black eyes, with long lashes; an oval face; a very small nose; small pretty ears; very pretty mouth, brilliantly red; very even little teeth; complexion clear brown, with a color seen richly through. Her figure, long-limbed, slender; flat shoulders, and very slender waist; distance from the waist to the feet long in proportion; her hands small; in walking, her steps not long enough to show her feet before her dress; her dress, I think, a very dark gray, comes up to her throat, and is long in the skirt. She has put aside her cloak; a very high bearing; an air of independence and equality that resembles command, yet very civil and gentle; perfectly self-possessed; her voice low and very sweet, with a pretty accent.

"How comes this something wild and queenlike, with so perfectly feminine a bearing?

"She *is* a lady — I think a foreign one; her accent is not quite English. A Spaniard, perhaps.

"Suppose she should prove an escaped nun I "Not a bad conjecture. I wonder whether that is a conventual dress. I wish I had some drawings. We shall see its color with certainty in the morning. I think I saw beads and a cross for a moment.

"We shall see how she bears the Bible; we shall hear what she has to say about religion.

"What a Diana she looks!

"I should like to see the villain who, as Sheridan Knowles says, dares touch her with but a look!"

This was jotted down an hour later, and the sheet of paper has several sketches, each an improvement on the other, not one satisfactory; and under his disappointing essays he had written, in a kind of despair: —

"Or like the borealis' race, That flits ere you can mark the place."

Whatever William had expected, he certainly fancied that the embarrassment would have been altogether on the stranger's side. Well, it had turned out differently. This girl — she did not look more than eighteen — was quite unabashed, and William somehow did not mind lighting his pipe until he returned to his quaint study.

He did not return to his book — that was pretty well out of his head.

It was simple curiosity, he told himself. Of - course she was herself a very interesting person, he allowed, for he was a frank fellow; but it was the situation — the romance — the utter uncertainty, that really employed his thoughts; it was, in short, the story more than the heroine, he could swear, that exercised his imagination.

After he had bidden her welcome to Haworth Hall, and they had exchanged courtesies upon that occasion as guest and host, she seemed no longer to concern herself about his presence; her attention was unaffectedly engaged about other things. And while he was telling old Martha the story of his adventures on the moss that night, he was secretly mortified to observe that the stranger (for whom he perhaps intended it) was whispering something to Mall Darrell.

One thing was plain, and did not displease him: Martha Gillyflower had grown into something more than toleration of her, and the unknown had, in fact, grown into high favor with Martha.

William Haworth went to sleep that night thinking of his guest, and the first thing he thought of in the morning was. the same runaway nun. But was she a nun?

She had made them almost die of laughing with the story of a series of adventures which a poor man whom she knew had undergone at a fair in Warwickshire. Was that the sort of story which a young lady who had taken the veil would have been likely to hear? On the other hand, why should she not? She had not always been a nun, and even nuns hear stories. "I think old Gillyflower would like to keep her for a little longer;" and if so, he would give her leave.

## CHAPTER V.

### HER STORY.

MRS. GILLYFLOWER and she were sitting next morning in the kitchen, at the little deal table, with a coarse but very white cloth on it, and the teathings. Mall Darrell had done her breakfast, and was washing potatoes and peeling turnips, quite out of hearing, at the open door of die scullery, through which, faintly, were audible in the kitchen the crow and gobble of the busy poultry; and close to the kitchen-window, that opened in the side-wall, roses, planted by Peter Clinton, shook themselves up and nodded in the comparative shelter, and tapped on the panes, while the tall trees outside swayed their boughs and rustled boisterously in the still vehement wind.

"Darrat ta, lass! yer no gangin' to-day. Why, see how it blaas, an' the branches swings, an' the Squire himsel' has bid ye. An' I tell ye ye'll no flit the day — ye shan't goa noo, not a bit — ye'll just bide where ye er; ye'll stay ower the night, an' gang in the mornin,' if ye will. I like ye, lass; I see ye're none o' them fuirligig fools; ye hev sense an' observation, an' ye ken the aid saw to 'be merry an' wise.' Ye can make a body laugh when ye like. But ye're no gilliver, not a bit; ye heve principles an' feelin' like mysel', though ye don't keep braggin' o' them, nor talkin' any such clish-ma-clash; an' I like ye, lass, an' I should na wonder if I came to like ye better."

Old Martha was talking heartily, and honestly too. She had formed instinctively a good opinion of her new acquaintance; and such opinions, mysteriously but irresistibly derived, command our confidence often more than any others.

She meant to be encouraging; she had placed her broad dumpy hand upon the slender one of the girl, whose arm rested on the table.

The girl looked at her with a grave countenance, in which were yet mingled expressions odd: something of amusement — something of disdain — something of liking.

"Well, Mrs. Gillyflower," she said, drawing back her hand sedately, "you're kind — I don't mind if I do; 'twill be four rounds of the clock tomorrow; after that, I provide for myself."

"Provide for yersel'? Well, I'm glad ye hev no care o' that sort to grieve ye; ye're sure ye can?"

"I can."

"H'm! Well, that's a comfort — people and friends, I daresay?"

"I have friends, and I have relations," said the girl, quietly.

"Where do they live?"

"A good many miles away, but not so far that my feet won't carry me to them. I can walk a long way, when I like."

Mrs. Gillyflower was curious; her little round gray eyes were peering vainly into the dark, fiery, unfathomable eyes of the girl.

She felt that this girl was a different nature — a more potent spirit — that she could make nothing of her.

"Well, lass, I tell ye what," said the old woman. "We are not ower rich here, any o' us; that is, we hev quite enough, d'ye mind, but none to spare. But I doubt ye'r ill-provided — an' I have a bit o' money by me — an' I'd like to lend ye a pound, an' ye'll pay me whean ye can, or whean ye like; but ye'll want somethin' by the way, an' ye'll no refuse."

The girl quickly replaced her hand on the dumpy fingers of the old woman, with a movement like a caress; and with a wild smile she looked on her for a moment, and said, "You are very goodnatured, Mrs. Gillyflower — yes, and if it ever lies in my way to do you a good turn, I'll do it. Thank you very kindly; it was well-meant, but I don't need it, Mrs. Gillyflower. Look here!" and from her pocket she took a little scarlet-cloth purse with a silk cord tied round it, and poured out a tiny pile of silver on the table; and then, sweeping it back again, she continued: "And I'll tell you how I happen to be making this journey alone — I didn't intend, but you're goodnatured — I ran away!"

"Ran away, child — hey? Not from a husband, though?" she asked, with a sudden consternation.

The stranger laughed.

"No — no! that never was our way. I've been used cruel bad. I've a stepmother. I wouldn't wonder if you had a stepmother yourself, once?" she added, after a moment's pause.

"Well, noo, that *is* queer. So I had, lass, that *was* a tazzle, I can tell ye, and mickle she made me dree. I forgie her, an' may God forgie her too! But I'll never forget her, if I was to live for a thousand year. — An' so ye hev a stepmother? Tell me more, poor lassie! I ween there was cause, an' to spare, why ye should flee out o' her hands, as Jacob did fra the hands o' his unnatural brother Esau."

"'Twas all about a man," said the girl.

"A man?" repeated Martha Gillyflower, much interested. "Well — go on, dear."

"She wanted to give me to a wicked man — the worst fellow, almost, she knew. Ha!"

The ejaculation was like a gasp, quick and hard, and accompanied with a strange smile that showed her little white teeth suddenly — expressed abhorrence powerfully.

"That fellow, as I guess from the looks and whispers of some that knows all about him, has murdered people — several, and I think I know where some of the graves is. Well, *there* was a man to choose! And I said '*No*.' She wanted to be rid o' me, for one thing, and to put me into the hands of a devil for smother. I said '*No*, I'd die first'"

"Ye were right; I'd a' done the same my lass. I telt ye, right I kenned quick enough ye were nane o' them strackle-brained queans, I kenned ye had reason for what ye did."

"Ay, so I had. And she and I had words, and she snatched up the cudgel to break my head; and I caught it fast in my hand, and I flung her down; and 'twas just ay or no with me should I kill her — it's a heavy cudgel — 'twas like lightnin'; I did not

know myself — just a flicker and a chance — but I didn't come down with it, and I flung it over the casties; and said I, 'Tis the last time ye'll ever lift that to me!' and I left her that night."

"And right well done o' you. I'm maist sorry ye did not gie her a clink whaar 'twould make her lugs sing, a-toppa t' head; but ye did right to spare her, 'twas only what a Christian should."

"And she'll try to set that fellow on my track," continued the girl, "to kill me, if she can."

"And where did you live?"

"Well — a good way off — the name don't matter."

"And where are ye gangin'?"

"To friends and kin."

"And had ye no kin living nigh yer stepmother?"

"Ay, some; they left me to her, though — they don't care. I have a grand-aunt there; if she was younger, she loves me, and would not see me wronged, but she's too old for that work; and — ye were so kind, I've told ye all — and I mind the time I thought there was not a sore heart or wildered brain in all the world. — Hey! Why, there's a bird and a pretty cage! That's a bullfinch, and it can't whistle, I'm sure, but I'll teach it!" And by this time she was beside the cage, and began very sweetly to whistle a little tune. "Ay — av, see how he cocks his ear! I love birds! He will, the darling — he'll whistle, I tell ye!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### SUNRISE AND LIGHT.

PETER CLINTON rode the pony to the queer little post-town nine miles away, once a week, sometimes twice, when the Squire expected a letter, and brought home, at least, the county newspaper.

That morning the *Beacon of Northumbria* lay long on his table unopened. The Squire's head was running upon the adventure of last night, and the beautiful guest whom, a chance storm had cast at his door. When at last he did unfold that chronicle, a minute assured him that "there was nothing in the paper." How wearisome seemed the doings of the magistrates, the price of sheep, even the excitement of the hour — the inquest upon the peddler who died of a heart-complaint, at the "George" in Golden Friars!

But when he took up the paper a second time, a little paragraph, hid away in a corner, accidentally caught his eye, and instantly riveted his attention. It was printed in the following terms: —

"The neighborhood of Fothergang, twelve miles from Tatham, on the old Harrowgate road, and on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire, was thrown into considerable excitement, on the morning of the 14th instant, by the intelligence that a young nun had made her escape in the course of the night from the Convent of St. Mary, which was opened about five years since, as our readers will remember, with considerable *éclat*, near that hamlet. She is supposed to be travelling on foot, most probably in the direction of Morpeth, where she is stated to have some Protestant relatives resident, on whose protection she probably reckons. Formal information has been given to the magistrates of this elopement by the Superioress of the Convent who thus invokes the aid of the civil power to recover the custody of the young person who has made her escape. It is understood, however, that some messengers in the employment of the convent are already in pursuit. In the convent she is styled Sister Euphemia — her real name has not transpired. She is stated to be under 20, rather tall and slight, with dark eyes and hair — intelligent and good-looking. Her conventual faults were— 'too great a proneness to talk,'

'restlessness,' a 'tendency to levity,' and 'a disposition to question the authority of superiors.' Great excitement prevails in the neighborhood, and we need hardly say that the sympathies of the inhabitants are altogether with the poor young nun who has made her escape. It is thought that any attempt to bring her back publicly, and consign her to the tender mercies of the conventual authorities, would produce a very alarming state of feeling in the vicinity — possibly a somewhat notous search and rescue within the walls of the convent itself. It is stated that the local magistrates have applied to the Home Office for instructions under the circumstances."

This piece of intelligence William Haworth read over and over till he could have repeated it, word for word, by rote.

Nothing in the paper, indeed? Floods of light!

William changed color again and again — from red to pale, and from pale to red.

Had that eloquent paper, the *Beacon of Northumbria*, ever excited readers so fearfully before?

- With a great sigh, at last the Squire laid the paper down, smiling darkly to himself over the discovered mystery. For the present he would keep his proofs to himself. With his penknife he carved the paragraph out of its place in the paper, and locked it up quickly in his desk.

He would not take old Martha quite into his confidence; but he must sound her, and put the solution conjecturally before her. Her opportunities were so multitudinous; trifles would help the proof. It was very odd, but the idea had struck him, at once, that this girl, with her singular manners and unaccountable dignity, might be what this paragraph very nearly proved her.

He might, he thought, fairly be a little conceited of his penetration. The thing, however, was not quite proved yet. The solution might be something quite different. But, with the same dark smile, he thought, "We must at least admit that it is not altogether improbable."

Half an hour after, also, Mrs. Gillyflower, having no one else to talk to, popped into William's study, and after some conversation — about Peter Clinton's administration of the garden, and the old kitchen-jack that would not wind — suddenly recalled his wandering thoughts, and fixed them in a moment, by beginning: "That poor young lass has been and telt me all that's foan-out at heyam, and ill-served she has been wi' a raggard stepmother. I ken that sort ower-weel myself."

And with this exordium she told the story, and William shut his Sanscrit Dictionary, and stood listening with a romantic intensity, and his elbow on the chimneypiece.

The Squire of Haworth Hall had been a distinguished man in his college — a hard reader when he chose, a debater, a writer of essays; and he was, like many ingenious men with brilliant imaginations, one who could see a good way into a millstone.

"That young lady," said he — "for so I am sure she is — has a rosary with a cross to it; I saw it for a moment. Mind, Martha, this is quite between you and me, and you are not to repeat a word of it. She has quarrelled with her superioress, and possibly about some confessor she dislikes. She calls her superioress a stepmother, and so on. If we had time, I've a book there, which says, that when nuns have any complaint to make of their condition to people of the world, they often do so in allegory — I mean, a kind of parable."

"Well, that is queer. I never saa a nun in a' my days before, an' I should not wonder; but who'd think, to look at her an' hear her talk, she was that sly; but I consayted them nuns was always dressed in a windin'-sheet like, but doubtless you know best."

"Nothing, except from books. And she stays till tomorrow, then? That's right. The wind has shifted, not at this side of the house now; but still it is a high wind, and may be higher by evening."

"I left her whistling to the bird. She did look bonny, keekin' into the cage! She's a bonny lass, ain't she?"

"Yes — I daresay those who like dark beauties; but I'm held so fast to my books that my eyes are growing old, I fancy, and they can hardly admire anything. My eyes are on Sanscrit, and my heart in India. Not but I hope to come home, some day, with a hatful of money, to spend the rest of my days in the old place — where you are to welcome me back again, mind; and you'll keep

the old house together, and the fire burning, while I'm away, and write me a letter every post; and you'll have my tea and a hot bannock ready for me, just in the old way, the evening I come back."

And, so saying, he placed a hand on each shoulder of the old woman, and looked very kindly down into her face.

"Hey, yer na gane yet man — who kens?" said the old woman.

"True enough — who kens? as you say, Martha."

"Ay, ay — man proposes, God disposes; and I'll not be greetin' for my bonny lad, till I see his trunk packed and his hat on, for the flittm'."

And with these words, smiling bravely, her eyes filled up with tears; and turning briskly, she said:

"Hoot, lad — I'm wastin' the whole mornin', and nothin' down for dinner yet, and talk 'ill never mak ye fat. Get along wi' ye, an' let's mind our business."

And away she trotted.

The Squire went to the window; and to the left, a little way off, he saw the tall slender girl, very busy choosing and plucking roses from the huge bushes that grew near the paling.

How her head is set on! How she holds herself! She steps like a deer. How beautiful she is! — how elegant! How small her hand is!

Her black tresses were blown in the wind, and her fingers brushed them back every now and then. He lowered the window, smiling. At the noise she looked round at him, from the nodding bunch of roses in her hand, standing quite still, very gravely. Then she said something he could not hear, and smiled a little anxiously, and looked gravely at him again.

"You are too much at the corner there," he called, smilingly; "it is quite sheltered this way."

She drew near, in her leisurely way, walking with her short steps and high air; and with her grave proud look, she said, with the roses in her hand, a little toward him:

"I was gathering some flowers, sir; I hope it ain't any harm?"

There is something interesting in that voice, so sweet and gentle, that contrasts, somehow, with the style of her beauty and her proud bearing.

"Would not you be better with something on? Aren't you afraid of this rough wind? If you'll allow me, I'll go and ask Mrs. Gillyflower for your cloak and bonnet; I'll fetch it in a moment."

"No, thank you, sir," she answered, still gravely, though he was smiling. "I like the wind; I'm used to it — it never hurt any one."

"Well, you'll allow me to show you where there are much better roses, and I think other flowers?"

"Thank you, sir."

In a moment he was out on the grass — without a hat, of course; he would have been ashamed to wear one while her head was uncovered.

"It is so sheltered this way," he said, "just round this corner; and here, you see, the roses grow like great hedges."

And so they did — nothing the better of the wind, of course, but still very splendid festoons of red, white, and yellow roses.

"And this little nook is so sheltered; you don't feel the wind unpleasantly here."

It was a recess under the gable of the house, beyond which were the rear of tall stable-walls covered with ivy, and a great walnut-tree threw its shadow on the grass.

"Oh, yes; those roses are very fine; may I gather some, sir?"

"Certainly," said William, in a lower tone, that confessed the power of beauty. "You are *very* welcome to anything, everything you like, at Haworth."

William's color was heightened as he spoke. But there was nothing in the girl's manner to show that she thought herself addressed in any unusual strain, or that the speech could be made to comprehend more than the flowers she had asked leave to take.

For a few seconds they were both quite silent, and the handsome girl went on plucking these roses.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SQUIRE IMPROVES HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS GUEST.

WILLIAM was longing to talk, but he did not know how to begin. He felt a little *gêné*. In the girl's serenity there was, a feeling of inferiority that embarrassed him. He was very much afraid that she would have completed her task, and gone away with her arm laden with flowers, before he had made up his mind what to say. He was standing beside her without a word, and looking, he began to think, very foolish; and his awkwardness was enhanced by the secret misgiving, "What an ass she must think me!"

At last a thought struck him, and he said: —

"I was so glad you stayed with us."

"You are very kind, sir — yes, forty-eight hours — thank you, sir."

"If you had gone, you know, it would have been as much as saying you thought us churls, and did not trust our hospitality; and I wish — it is not impertinence, I assure you — to ask you, if you'll allow me, just a question or two. May I?"

"Certainly, sir," said the girl, turning toward him, and standing like a picture of a Southern Flora, with her roses hanging clustered over her arm, and her eyes lowered to the grass near her foot. She does not look as if he were going to question her, but proud and grave, as a princess going to hear a petition.

"It was only this," he began. "Mrs. Gillyflower says you are going to make a journey to the residence of some of your friends. I don't know, of course, what the distance may be; but if you will allow me, I will tell Clinton, and you can drive in the taxicart, twenty miles, in any direction you please."

"Thank you, sir — that's very kind of you; but I'll walk, sir," said this independent heroine. "I've very good shoes, sir."

And, by way of demonstration, she put out, in a strong shoe, the very slenderest and shapeliest foot he had ever seen.

"Well — and will you pardon me this? You know you are very young," he added, wisely, "and you can't have much experience in travelling, especially in such travelling. And I rather think you have been leading a particularly quiet life."

He said this pointedly, *apropos* of another accidental glimpse of her rosary, and he paused for a little; but there followed not the least sign or movement to indicate acquiescence or denial.

"And at all events," he said, "I wish so very much you would allow me to renew Mrs. Gillyflower's offer; she is really quite unhappy about it, and so am I — very; you ought to have some little provision more than she says you have about you."

"That's good of you, sir, but I have more money than I want; very little would carry me a long way."

"I see you are more cruel than you look; you won't allow me to be of the least use — you'll accept nothing from us. I think that is hardly kind, Miss — Miss — You have not even told me your name."

"Any name you please will do, sir."

"Oh, I may take my choice," he laughed. "I know that young ladies, when they betake themselves to a solitary life, change their names, as they do when they marry. Miss Mayflower, or Miss Nightingale, becomes Sister Eugenia, or Sister Cecilia; and I suppose you mean that I am at liberty to choose from the calendar, and I can't choose very wrong."

He said all this archly; he fancied — simple youth! — that he might bring about a confidence, and become a champion; and he was growing to feel that he would give half Haworth for a chance of fighting in her quarrel. But the girl stood, as before, with her eyes lowered to the grass near her foot. "You've refused all my poor requests," said he. "I believe that compassion is killed in the shadow of the cloister, and a cruel purity, taintless and cold as snow, dwells only in that colorless and freezing life. May I ask you a question?"

"Surely, sir."

"Is it true that you fear a revengeful man is in pursuit of you?"

"Mrs. Gillyflower told you that — did not she?" asked the girl, raising her splendid eyes to his.

"Yes, certainly, it was she," he replied. "It is so, sir — quite true. That's why I stayed; I would not have him overtake me in a lonely place. He's always plotting mischief and rolling revenges. They say he's mad; drink, I think, has made his brain unsound. I should have to run and fight and fight and run, for my life. He would not think twice; he'd flog me with his cudgel, as ready as look, and throw me in a brook."

"Thank you for speaking so frankly," said he. "Now, remember you are my guest and your life is *dear* to me; you shan't leave this tomorrow."

"Have you heard he's about here?" she asked.

"No matter," said he, evading. "You must stay over tomorrow. I say I will not risk you."

"I would stay tomorrow, sir, only I'm sure my people will be looking for me; I sent them word."

"That's no reason. If they care for you as they ought, they should be only too glad that you were made safe until that ruffian is off your track. Pray remain; do — I entreat!"

He placed his hand upon her arm as he pleaded.

"It is very good of you, sir; and as you say, so I will."

"You have made me so happy," said he, and he did look quite radiant; "and I'll tell Martha. Perhaps you'd prefer that she should ask you; and would not it be well if you told her everything? You have no idea what a wise old woman she is. She could give you such good counsel, and who knows but it may end by your staying with her — for I'm sure you like a quiet life — a great deal longer than you ever dreamed."

And so he went on, eloquently, for a good while.

What was there so odd and unsatisfactory in the expression of her beautiful features, as the girl listened to his eloquence? He tried afterwards to analyze it. It resembled the expression which they wore in conversation with Martha Gillyflower — the

expression with which a beautiful girl might listen to the kindly prattle of a child who thought itself wondrous wise. Amused superiority and goodnature, and something of sadness and compassion, were there.

"Well, I've been giving very wise advice, as I supposed, and I see you are laughing at me," said he, with a smile.

"No, sir, I don't laugh; you would not think that, but what you say would not answer me; there's no one thing about it I could do."

She smiled genuinely now, and shook her head.

"Well, I've had my innings, and done no good; will you try now? I should be very glad of good advice. Here I am, a poor man, of an old but decayed family, and far from content with his lot: what do you advise me to do?"

"I'm not fit to advise such as you are, sir."

"Pray do, though. How can you tell? — how can I? I have no one to advise me, and your counsel might be the very best I could have."

"I don't think so."

"Well, but try — pray do."

"Do you understand horses?"

"No."

"Are you going for a soldier?"

"No; what would you change about me?"

"I don't know, sir; I think I'd throw the books out o' the window."

"Why?"

"They're not manly. Why should you be sitting all day, like a woman, in a room — stifling?"

"But I must earn money, and I can't do that without reading."

"Liberty is better than money. What does a man want, after all, but bread and health? Men shutting themselves up in a house, like ladies! I sometimes wonder they're not ashamed!"

There was no enthusiasm, real or affected, in this speech, which she spoke musingly; but it nettled him, for he thought he saw in her pretty face more of the old expression of amusement and disdain.

"Well, I for one don't like it — I hate it!" pleaded he. "But so it is. We must do it, or be nowhere in the great race."

"The great race up a hill, they say, and over a scawr; that's what makes them old and tired before they're well begun, spending their lives chasing — nothing! — in place of learning how little will make a man happy, and living in freedom."

He looked in her face, and somehow he felt that the girl was right, and life a fallacy and a perversion.

"I dare say you are right," he said, with a sigh. "I'm sure you *are* right; but we are entered so early for the race — in for the combat before we know; and then habit and pride, You speak truth, I think; but after a certain point is past, truth only makes us sad."

"I'm going now, sir; in—"

"And — and — you won't tell me your name?"

"I could tell you many names, sir, that would do as well as mine."

"As well! — How?"

"As well to call me by, for a day."

"Well, you won't trust me."

"There's none but enemies near here that knows my name. I'd rather not, sir."

"I must only make a guess, then — shall I?"

"No harm, sir — no good; you'll never guess it," she answered, carelessly.

"Will you tell me truly if I make a good guess?"

"I don't think you will."

"I think I could tell you one that is very like it."

"Perhaps you could, sir."

"Well, then, I think it is not very unlike — *Euphemia*," said William Haworth, with a smile.

His meaning glance was met by a sudden flash from the girl's splendid eyes; and she looked at him, for a moment or two, with a sort of startled expectation. It subsided in a moment more, but the Squire had made his inferences.

"You see, I'm not quite so much in the dark as you supposed," said he, still smiling; and then more earnestly he continued: "But you are not to suppose — I am sure you could not do me that wrong — that if an accident has told me more than you intended to confess, I could be base and cowardly enough to permit any human being, while you honor my poor house with your presence, to trouble your quiet, or endanger your liberty. Pray rely upon me. We have never been cowards — never been traitors. I would defend you with my life!"

She looked with a side-glance of her large eyes in the face of the enthusiastic young man, and then down on the flowers that lay in a blooming sheaf on her arm, and said: —

"Some folks say you northern squires are hard — but all agree you're proud — and you'll allow none, small or great, that depends on you to be wronged; and I think you're kind beside, sir, and would not like to see any one in trouble. Is not that so?"

William smiled.

"You give us north - countrymen a good character, and me in particular; and I am too much gratified by your commendation to refuse it. But, be that how it may, rely on us; we will take good care of you while you remain at Haworth."

"You are good to me — all," said the girl; "and please, sir, I'll go in with these roses now — very kind; and I hope God will bless you!"

"And, mind, you've promised you stay over tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir — thanks."

"Give me your hand upon it."

And so she did, instantly. What a pretty slender hand it was! He was holding it longer than need be.

“I keep my word, sir, always. I’m grateful, sir, for your kindness,” she said, with a grave and gentle air, drawing her hand back at the same time, as if to settle the straggling flowers on her arm; and so she was gone, and he alone.

And William Haworth sighed, and leaned his shoulder against the tree, and sighed again. He was thinking of liberty, and sighing, to think that yearning for it was vain as for heaven. And yet — why?



## CHAPTER VIII.

### “YOCK, NACK, BALLO.”

THAT evening, in his study, William was disturbed by faint and far-away sounds of merriment from the kitchen. It is a house of thick walls and strong doors, but in the silence of his room the merry vibration reached him. He went into the hall and listened, and heard, at the end of the passage which leads to the kitchen, such a hurlyburly of hilarity as he could not have conceived it possible for only three people to make.

The old housekeeper was screaming peal after peal of laughter, such as he did not think mortal could utter, and retain any breath at all. A wonderful grunting or snoring sound, uttered with a sort of rhythm, accompanied one of the oddest songs he had ever heard, the melody of which resembled a piece of church-music, with a wild comic refrain attached to it at every verse. It was sung by a very sweet voice — a demi-contralto, rich and powerful, which somehow he had no difficulty in allotting to the stranger.

Now what could the row be, he wondered: some fun, of course, that delightful girl has set going.

Well, certainly, she was the mistress of these revels, and very funny the fun was to witness, “if hot to describe.

They had been drinking their tea together — Mrs. Gillyflower, the guest, and Mall. Tea ended, the girl had resumed her work, and old Martha and the stranger began to talk. A very voluble companion, in truth, was this guest, and kept the old woman, who loved a talk and a story, very agreeably employed.

Now she was telling her a long story — the sort of thing that old housekeepers like to gossip over. It was about her mother’s last illness, and her death.

There were touching incidents at the close, and the young girl told them with a true simple eloquence, that moved good Martha Gillyflower, albeit she despised the melting mood, to tears.

That strange girl did not weep, although she drew tears from the proud energetic old woman.

“Come — come, ma’am, you must cry no more; I’ll bite your little finger if you do.”

The old woman looked at her, not knowing what to make of her threat; for she seemed very serious, and showed the tiny edge of her white teeth.

“Na — na, lass! ye’ll no bite my finger,” said Mrs. Gillyflower, drying her eyes quickly, with a little severity.

“Don’t you tempt me, Mrs. Gillyflower.”

“Don’t ye talk nonsense, child.”

“Well ye’ve stopped crying, and that’s all I wanted. Mall’s done her work; we’re going to dance a dance for ye. Give her leave to come — do, please; pray do. — Mall! Mrs. Gillyflower says ye may come.”

Well, Mrs. Gillyflower did agree, with just reluctance and conditions enough to reserve her importance, and in a moment the tiled floor was cleared.

“Where’s the bellows? that’s right — and here’s a stick. Now, Mrs. Gillyflower — mind, I’m the bear-leader, and a fiddler beside; and the bear is sick, and I’m lamenting with him over his sickness, and we try a dance now and then, but it won’t do; and Mall is the bear. I’ll have her ready in a minute; and may I throw this wood on the fire to make a good blaze, that you may see us well? Come in, Mall — bring your candle — come into the room, till I dress you for the bear.”

Grinning from ear to ear, in marched Mall, with lengthy strides, and in two or three minutes emerged with a vizard on, made of brown-paper stitched over with tufts of black wool, a clever imitation of a bear’s head; her arms and legs encased in long black stockings, the feet of which were stuffed out so as to resemble two long paws. The gait of the bear had been carefully rehearsed. The bear was muzzled, and a cord from its nose tied round the fiddler’s arm: and with bent knees, lifting its feet high at every step, and paws raised after the manner of a begging dog — her dark dress so disposed and tied about her as to harmonize with the other dispositions, and make a very good rough imitation of the brute — in came the interesting invalid, hanging his head, now on this side, now on that, and emitting dolorous grunts; while the woebegone fiddler, with his bellows to his chin, the stick, by way of bow, across it, and the cord about his arm — turning up his eyes in agony, or rolling them on the bear with rueful affection — gave a final charge to his associate performer:

“Now, mind all I said. Remember when ye sit down, and when ye stand up; and every time I call ye ‘Sir Bruin, the Bear,’ ye make a low bow, mind; and when I sing ‘My son! my son!’ ye hug me with your arms; and when I sing quick, ‘Oh, poor fallow — Yock, nack, ballo!’ (In a foreign language, which the stranger understood, these words mean “Eyes, nose, hair and were introduced in the refrain describing the ubiquity of the offerings of Sir Bruin, every part being affected) then ye dance round, first on one leg and then on the other; and when I say ‘Chatters, mooie, cherro — (In the same language, and similarly introduced, these words mean, “Teeth, mouth, head.”) We’ll drive him in the barrow,’ you sit down fainting-like. And now look, Mrs. Gillyflower, please; we’re just beginning.”

It needed no such exhortation, for that good woman, with a recluse’s appetite for fun, was staring and listening, all eye and ear, with a preparatory grin on.

So the dramatic dance and song commenced: and to those who have ever witnessed it performed with the gravity of genuine humor, the mutual and somewhat ceremonious respect of the bear and the fiddler, the suffering and the sympathy, ‘the tender affection and condolences, and the momentary gleams of hope and hilarity — it will be no wonder that, before it had proceeded far, old Martha was in such screams of laughter that it was a marvel she did not roll off her chair, or die in the struggle to catch her breath.

The beautiful creature who played the fiddler could not, do what she would, divest herself of her grace and her prettiness, and her clever acting was made but the more irresistible by these pleasant incongruities.

Old Martha shook — she shrieked — she rolled; down her cheeks streamed tears of merriment; she inarticulately waved her hands imploringly, to arrest the fun that was convulsing her. But it proceeded to the end, and caused the uproar that disturbed William, who, I am afraid, was beginning to grow more idle than was right.

He would have liked to pay his visit to Mrs. Gillyflower then, but he feared he might interrupt the fun. He stood, and listened to the strange hurlyburly, highly amused, and also interested. Sometimes he lost patience with honest Martha, whose roars of laughter almost drowned the song, which he thought wonderfully quaint and pretty, and the voice quite beautiful. I think he was fast falling in love with his mysterious guest.

“Well,” said old Martha, breaking in on his solitude, “that’s the lithesomest lass that ever I sid. If you’d a’ sin how connily she did it!”

“I heard you laughing, and I thought I heard singing.”

“So you did,” cried Martha, hilariously, and she described the whole performance with boisterous merriment “I tell you what, I never laughed so in my life before; an’ I saw a play in the York theatre, an’ singin’ an’ dancin’ there, but nothin’ like this to make a body laugh. Hoot, man! where war ye that ye didn’t come and see it? — ye’d a’ never forget it while ye lived. I wish she may be as skilled in graver things, tho’, but I don’t know what to make of her.”

“What is it, then? tell me what you mean,” said he, struck by the sudden gravity of her looks.

“Well, I’ll tell ye. I took down the Bible this evening, when we had done our tea, and I read a chapter; and she listened quite quiet, and when I shut it she asked me, ‘What book is that?’ I looked at her, thinkin’ she was funnin’ me. But twasn’t nothin’ o’ the kind. Then I consayed she meant, ‘What book o’ the Old Testament is it?’ So I said, ‘Genesis.’

“And who wrote Genesis?” says she.

“The Bible,” says I, “is the Word of God.”

“Ay, but you said this is Genesis,” says she. “An’ don’t you know,” says I, “that Genesis is a part o’ the Bible?”

“I might a’ known it,” says she, “if I liked.” Well, that puzzled me a bit, and I looked at her in a sort o’ jummmlement, for I didn’t know what to make o’ her; and seein’ me look so earnest, she laughed hearty, you’d think she’d a’ died a’most. Well, I considered, an’ remembrin’ what ye said, I thought, if she be a nun she must be a Catholic, an’ Catholics, as I’ve heard say, never reads their Bibles; so just to try, says I, ‘Tomorrow’s Sunda, ye’ll be cornin’ to church, I suppose?’

“The Squire goes to church?” says she. “Yes, an’ reads his Bible, too,” says I. “I don’t mind if I do,” says she; “but my bonnet blew off on the moss the evening I came, and can ye lend me anything to put on my head? — and’ I’ve no good clothes, nothin’ with me.” So Mall is stayin’ at home, and she’ll lend her Sunda bonnet, an’ she’s cornin’ to church; so she can’t be a Catholic, ye see.”

“That does not follow — it is no proof at all. I’ve seen Roman Catholics in church. They have no objection — at least no difficulty. They can say their own prayers to themselves while ours are being read, and so don’t hear one word of them. Have you ever seen her tell her beads, though, or tap her breast with her closed hand at her prayers?”

“I don’t go into her room for her candle till she’s in bed, so I can’t say what her prayers may be.”

“Have you ever seen her ‘cross herself like this, before or after meals, when we say grace?”

“No, sir.”

“They do it very quietly, to avoid singularity; but watch her tomorrow, and we’ll see how church will please her. Her not being well up in her Bible looks very like it. I rely very much on first impressions. I think she is a foreigner, and I think she is a Roman Catholic. We shall see.”

“Well,” said Martha, “I’m jealous of that myself.”

“And now I’ll take my pipe to the kitchen; she won’t mind, and it would be a pity to break an old custom,” said the Squire.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE RUINS OF HAZELDEN.

NEXT day William walked to Wymering Church, five miles away, whither Clinton drove Martha Gillyflower and her guest. The tall girl with her dark-gray cloak on, and a borrowed black straw bonnet of Mall's, and a black veil supplied by the good old woman, was a demure and nun-like figure enough. If she knew nothing of our church service, she nevertheless went through — shall I call it? — her drill very exactly; she imitated, I suppose, the down-sittings and up-risings, the kneelings and the courtesies, and the reverential air of the worthy old housekeeper, close by whose side she stood, enjoying, as they did in the quaint little church, a small seat to themselves near the door.

It is not possible, however, quite to veil such beauty as that of the young girl who stood beside Mrs. Gillyflower. That devout woman was made uneasy and indignant by the marked attention with which the three persons who constituted the worth and gallantry of that primitive place of worship regarded her companion. Squire Belleston, who lived four miles away at the other side, and is a lean young fellow of 50, with a good deal of gold-chain and jewelry, and a flower always in his button hole, ogled the pew, with marked but sly benignity, during the admirable sermon of the Rev. Doctor Runt. Short Mr. Alfred Runt, the rector's eldest son and heir, did, in more earnest if less graceful fashion, the same thing; and young Mr. Sudors, the doctor's assistant, who had come all the way from Golden Friars to spend the day, sacrificed the entire Litany to ogling in a lost sweet way the selfsame point of observation — sucking all the while the polished ivory ball that forms the handle of his cane, and which he was very near swallowing in consequence of a sudden look of fierce detection from Mrs. Martha Gillyflower.

These interesting young gentlemen would possibly have given that discreet chaperone further trouble, had they not been entangled in the porch by their, young lady acquaintances and others. So Martha in the taxcart led by Peter Clinton, and the strange girl on foot, found themselves quite unmolested ascending the steep bit of hill under the old ash-trees near the church.

Perched on a bough of one of these great ash-trees that stoop over that narrow road, and half-hid among the ivy that thickly covers it, a little blackeyed sunburnt boy looked down on them as they slowly made their way up the hill. He dropped from the branch to the road, and ran after the girl, begging with the whine of a professed mendicant.

When the horses had reached the top of the hill, the girl had fallen some way behind, and was talking with the little fellow, who was walking slowly up the hill beside her. She questioned the boy sharply, and lent an attentive ear, with a very thoughtful face, as he answered volubly. When Clinton looked back, he saw her dismiss him with a wave of her hand; and then she hurried after the taxcart, and got up in silence, with an anxious and pale face, and did not speak to Martha till they had got a long way towards home.

"How long have you lived, Mrs. Gillyflower?" she asked, at last.

"Hoot, lass — there's a question! Well, a good while, ye may suppose."

"Well — well! well — well!" said the girl, sadly.

"And what's the matter now, wisehead?"

"I was thinking ye must be pretty well tired," she said, sweetly, with a shrug.

"Tired! Not I, lass; I'm good for twenty years yet."

"I don't know what we're put here for. Life's a fire that burns *sore*, Mrs. Gillyflower; I'd rather mine was cold," wailed the girl. "'Taint long cutting a grave, and then there's no more trouble about a poor fool!"

"By Jen, here's a doleful homminy!" said the old woman. "Do you want to put us in the dumps? Awa' wi' ye, ye goose!"

"Goose and gander; your parson said the same to-day — up in his box," said the girl, more like herself. "If I'm a fool, he's a bigger! And what are you, Mrs. Gillyflower, to go all that way to listen to his preachment?"

"There's a wide difference between a parson in a pulpit and a chit like you, lass, jiggin' heam in a gig. Can't ye talk o' something else, dear, and leave those things to sich as understand them?"

"That's a secret we'll all understand some day," said the girl, and laughed gently.

About an hour later William tapped at the kitchen-window, close to which the girl was whistling to the bullfinch.

"Come out, Miss Perdita, please, till I show you one of our castles; and if old Martha hears you whistling on Sunday; I don't know what may happen. I know *I* dare not do it."

She blushed, she laughed, and she ran out.

"You were very good to come, and make no favor of it," said William, speaking low.

"It is none, sir. It may lie in my power yet to serve you, and if it should, I will."

"I'm sure you would — though I don't deserve it. I call you Miss Perdita, because I don't know your name, and you won't tell it; and I should consider that a favor, for instance, if you would."

"Any name you please, sir. Names are nothing."

"We go by this path. You see the ruin, quite close to us. We lived there once, before this house was built. But why won't you tell me your name? — ain't that very unkind?"

"'Twould be no kindness to tell it, sir; my name's no consequence."

"If you knew me better, perhaps you would tell it?"

"Yes, sir — if I knew you better."

"And liked me better?"

"I'm of no consequence, sir; I shan't be here long," she said, very gravely. "I should not like my name mentioned. If some people could find out where I was, they would hurt me, I think; and please, sir, don't ask me."

He walked on a few steps in silence, looking down at the grass near his feet — disappointed. After a while, said William, raising his eyes, and looking about him:

"There is one place that I have been at, that is wonderfully like this; and oh! I wish I knew everything that has ever happened there."

Rather a crazy speech was this, but he looked serious enough. He was thinking of the paragraph about the fugitive nun in the *Beacon of Northumbria*, which had begun to trouble him.

"It is a place on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire; it is very like this — only it has a nunnery, but that is in a hollow, and shows very little; and there is a ruined castle there — so like this — with just the same kind of trees about it; it is called Fothergang, and I think you have been there, not very long ago; I'm nearly sure — and — will you tell me?"

It was not mere curiosity that urged this question. It was an entreaty rather than a question, and urged with an earnestness that was pathetic.

The girl looked at him darkly with a side-glance for a second, and dropped her eyes, and then looked, in silence, at the walls of the old castle; and then, with a fearless look at William, dismissing her momentary embarrassment, and with a little tone of defiance in what she said, she answered:

"Yes, sir, I have seen that place; I suppose you have been told so. I've been at Fothergang lately; and now you may tell the people that's looking for me, if ye like."

She turned away slowly, pale, and with a faint smile in which he saw pain and scorn.

"Tell those people!" he repeated. "Why, I'd *die* to protect you! How can you — how could you — say anything so cruel? Not to living creature but yourself should I for worlds say anything that could endanger you!"

"I was vexed. I don't think, maybe, all I said; and I won't talk of Fothergang another word."

"Nor I," said the Squire, "nor ask a question."

A considerable silence intervened before he resumed his office of cicerone.

"From this little knoll it looks very well. I don't know why they did not go on living there; it was a much finer building than the house. The house was built just 180 years ago, and we have been growing poorer and poorer ever since. It was not lucky, you see. There used to be fighting here long ago, in these northern counties — very different from our times. We had seven castles; that is half as many as the Howards had," said William.

"One house is enough for a family — and too much often," she said, quietly.

"You mean where there is not money to keep it," said William with a shrug and a laugh.

"You say you're poor, sir, but you've been very kind; would not it be vile in me to laugh at your poverty? You'll not think so of me." She looked beautifully proud, and her fiery black eyes turned on him for a moment. "I would not let any one make little of you, sir."

I don't know that William Haworth had ever felt so gratified before. He was silent for a little time — he was so happy and proud.

He did not acknowledge it; he went on speaking of the ruined towers before them. He was looking at her, and had never seen, he thought, anything so beautiful. William Haworth, you never were in so great danger before! He was growing, without half knowing it, to love her.

"Come as far as that door; through it you can see a great deal."

They stood side by side, and she looked into the *chiaroscuro* of the old chamber; and on its great stone angle, on which was seen the chiselling of seven hundred years before, she leaned her hand, an image of perishable youth and grace.

"You never saw a place like that before, did you?" said William.

"Oh yes, sir; we were once close to one very like this. I used to be in it every day, running up and down a curlikew stair like that, and running along the wall at top; I was always very nimble."

So William told his story, and pointed out all that was worth seeing; and, leaning on the side of the doorway, he looked at her and sighed.

"I like *you* better every hour; it is hard you don't like me better!" and with this odd and sad speech he was silent. Then he said:

"I tell you what — I'll set this down in my mind. Whenever you tell me your name, it will be a sign that you trust me more, and like me better; and I won't ask — you shall do it of yourself. But I'll tell you mine. My name is Willie, and you must call me by it, and never '*Sir*' any more."

"I'm only a poor girl, sir; I could not do that."

"You will — I entreat!"

"No, sir. My people — we keep separate — they like that best. I'll take no such freedom, sir; I'm only a poor girl."

"No, you're not poor. You're the wealthiest girl in England, in the true wealth of beauty, and grace, and mind; and the finest lady that ever I saw or could imagine!"

"I did not think you could talk so foolish, sir," said the girl, turning her head toward home, with a pained look.

"Is it foolish ever to speak the truth?" said he, impetuously.

"I'm going home, sir, to the house; the old lady will be expecting me. There was a thing I was going to tell you — a question to ask — but that don't matter."

"But it does matter; I implore of you to tell me!"

"No, sir. I don't like that wild talk you're so fond of — it's making little of me."

"It was, perhaps, very wrong," he said, after a moment's thought. "I'll be quite different, you'll see. You must forgive me. You don't think — you couldn't — that I ever forgot the respect I owe you?"

"No, I don't think that; but I don't like it, sir, nohow; and can't we talk quiet, like other folk?"

"Well — well, can I do more than promise? I won't; I'll speak just as you please. I'll keep my word, upon my honor!"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TWO PURSUERS.

"IT is only this, sir," said the girl. "A friend has warned me, that two men, who bear me an ill-will, are coming to the Fair of Willarden on Tuesday, and that they believe I am somewhere about this part of the country, and think to meet with me there. So, sir, I'll leave this place early in the morning, before night; and I know the road they're coming, and I can be sure, by making a round, to keep clear of them — and get safe, I hope, to my own friends. And I'm very grateful, sir, for your kindness. You've been good to me — may God bless you!"

"Oh, no! you're not to think of going yet. How can you like to torture me so? What is old Martha to do without you? Don't you feel safe where you are? You say I've been kind. I know it is not in my power to show the kindness I feel — it is the curse of being so poor; but surely you won't be so cruel as to go, on this short notice. It is the one favor I ask, that you don't leave us for a few days — a week. These fellows will soon have left this part of the world; but in the meantime, how can you, or any one, tell where they may be prowling? And — and — I *entreat* you'll not think of it."

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his entreaty.

"Well, sir, it is a good chance to get clear away, but I won't go for a few days. You ought not to tell me to stay. If I do, I can't go till I learn what way they travel after the fair, and that could not be till Wednesday. I've been here too long — I have indeed, sir; it is best to go."

"You are not to go. You consented to stay. I have your promise, and you must keep it."

The girl looked in his face, and laughed low, and not unkindly.

"I like this place," she said. "I like Mrs. Martha: you're all good to me. I like Haworth, for a while, but I couldn't stay long — no, no, I couldn't."

"Well, that can't be helped, when the time comes; but you must stay a week, and then good-by. We'll not think of it till the time comes; and then, if fate will have it so, farewell, our pleasant friend." They walked side by side, a little way, in silence.

"Tell me," he said, "if I should chance to meet those fellows, that I may know them and give you warning: what are they like, and what are their names?"

"There's two, sir. They are very bad fellows. The old fellow is of middle height, but very broad in the shoulders, and awful strong — with a very brown face, and a flat nose, and very long black hair, and with always a stick in his hand — and he goes by the name of Cowper. The young man is tall and light-built, and he goes by the name of Lussha Sinfield. He wears a short coat, and he has a colored kerchief about his neck, red-and-green, commonly. He has now got two horses to sell; one is chestnut, and the other, taller by a hand or more, is an iron-gray hunter. He rides very well; he'll be putting the horse over jumps, to show him off, and he's quick to quarrel, and bloody-minded; and he never forgets a wry word, or an ill-turn — he's sure to pay you off some day; and he's very strong, and awful good at the cudgel. He got three months in jail, they say, for killing a man, with a rap across the temple, in Lincoln. It was a fair fight, though, and that saved him. He has a cudgel in his hand commonly, and if he should get into a quarrel without one, the old man is sure to be nigh, and lends him his. And the old fellow will be going to and fro in the fair, you'd suppose he had nothing to do, but he's after his own business for all that; and if you should see them anywhere near here, I'd like well you'd tell me, for there's not two blacker-hearted men in England, or that wishes any creature worse than they do to me."

"If I can help it they shan't vex you. Why do you look so troubled? While you stay here it is impossible — the miscreants! — you are as safe as if you were in the Queen's palace. But tell me how it happens that these men should hate and pursue you — so young, and, if it were no tiling else, so powerless, as you are, to harm them?"

"I despised them, sir; and I said they were thieves and worse, and they never forgive anything or any one; and they are cunning, sir, not easy to match them. If I was with my people, sir, I would not care, but it is a long way still. Those fellows would come here in a minute, if they thought they might find me, pretending to sell their horses — and there's my danger."

"But they are to be at the fair on Tuesday?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you know what road they are coming?"

"Up, sir, from the south."

"Well, this lies quite out of their way — to the left, don't you see? You are quite safe here, for the present, and I think I shall hear something about their movements. I shall learn all about them, and have them properly watched; and mind, you have promised to stay quietly here, a little longer — for a week, at least."

"I say again, God bless you, sir! Now I'll go in, sir, please; Mrs. Gillyflower will be wondering where I am."

"In a moment — only one word. I thought you had been in a convent, and had made your escape — that, I daresay, is all a mistake; but — will you forgive me? — your accent, your way of speaking, makes me think you have been with foreigners, and your appearance is foreign; and only one question — if it is impertinent, say so — but do any of your people live in Spain?"

"Yes, sir; when we were staying for awhile at a place called Church Sterndale, in Derbyshire, we met a man there; he was in trouble, but he had seen them there, and told us a deal about them. And I didn't much mind; I was a young thing then — just a fool of a child, sprawlin' on the grass, and stringin' daisies, and blowin' the clock-flower to see what hour it was; and I listened in a way, for it seemed to me like a story of king and queen, and the woods and the fairies. But that's all, and ask me no more about my people, nor where I came from, nor where I am going to. I must hold my tongue, and if you would have me speak, I can't — that's all — I can't, and I must only go."

"Did not I say that you were to answer *nothing* but what you pleased? And on this express condition I am going to venture one more question — very trifling — only about a toy, a little string of beads, with, I think, a cross to the end of it. It ain't a

necklace, is it? I saw it quite accidentally — will you tell me what it is?"

"No, I'll not tell that — nor nothing; I'll hold my tongue about myself, sir, please," she said, with a look of unmixed disdain, and a sudden flash from her splendid eyes. "If you thought 'twas a toy, sir, you'd never have asked. I know what you think — and so you may; but no one will pick out from me more than I choose to tell, and no gentleman will try."

"Well, I did think it something more. I was wrong to ask. Won't you make it up? I did wrong."

"I was wrong too, sir, to speak so quick to you, that has been so good to me. I'm sorry, sir.

"You'll give me your hand; it is all forgiven then, is not it?"

She did give him her hand, with a sigh. Grief is everywhere, like the air about us, though we don't see it; and pain is coursing through its allotted channels, like the blood, though it throbs concealed!

## CHAPTER XI.

### LOST AND FOUND.

THAT night William smoked his pipe into the chimney, as usual. The girl, for a wonder, seemed out of spirits. William talked, but only old Martha answered; and when the time came, he wished all "Good night," and went away to his study. The guest bid her "Good night" also, and departed to her room; and Martha Gillyflower, being now alone, made some final arrangements in the kitchen, and in a little time, according to her careful custom, knocked at the stranger's door, purposing to go in and take away her candle.

No answer was returned.

"Just her head under her wing, and asleep wi' her, like a bird," said the old woman. But when she went in the girl was nowhere to be seen. The candle was there, but nothing was disturbed or missing except the small bag of scarlet cloth, and the things she had in it when she arrived. Her dark-gray cloak, too, had disappeared from the peg on which it hung beside the door.

"There it is!" said Mrs. Gillyflower, energetically. "See how she serves one! Why, it can't be! There's the bed turned down as I saw it an hour ago. Not a hand to it since — nothing stirred in the room but her cloak and the little red bag. Only her candle's here. I'd say there wasn't a soul in the room but myself tonight. And there's her things gone, and her cloak; and — it may be she's gone to Mall's room to talk a bit; but I don't think it — I don't.

She hurried away, being, nevertheless, strongly of that opinion.

"Get up, Mall, and help me to look. The lass is gone! Sweetbrier's goner as sure as you're there! Get up, and don't be ogglin' there like a nofflin'; there's Sweetbrier gane awa', and tale or tidings o' her nowhere."

"Agoy!" exclaimed the lass, blinking and staring in wonder, just emerging from her deep first sleep.

"Come — will ye! Huddle yer things on, and come wi' me this minute."

Mall's simple equipment was not long in completing.

"Now, ye look under the bedstocks — I can't stoop so. Well, is she?"

"Na, neyâwhere," answered the girl. "She's outen — she's awa', I'm feared."

"Nane o' yer proas, child, but stir and look about ye. She was ever sa keen, but I doubt she is gane, she'd be awa' like that Stir, lass — twill be a dull house without her."

They were looking irresolutely about the room, as they stood with their backs to the bedstead; and there came from above, on Mrs. Gillyflower's head, a tap with a little naked foot.

"Well, child?" said she, sharply, to Mall.

"Yes, 'm," answered Mall.

"Well? Is there aught? Is there nout to show or point to? WeH, will ye mind how ye're turnin' and knockin' yersel' about?"

"Yes, 'm," answered Mall "Ye searched the press, then — so did I, and now ye see—"

Here was another little tap of the same tiny foot "Stop that pushin', ye fool!" said old Martha.

"Yes, 'm," said Mall, removing a little from her side.

"And noo ye see what gratitude is! She's let herself out by the scullery-door, and she's gane. She's tae'n hersel' awa' without as much as 'fares-ta-weel,' the fause lass! We'll just gang and see what way she went out, and then I'll to your master in the study, and tell him a' — and I could sit down here and greet!"

Mall looked on the point of "blubberin'," as she termed it, also. At the same moment the same little foot was laid lightly on the shoulder of Mrs. Gillyflower, who had now turned towards the door.

"Tak yer hand aff my shooder — what's the matter wi' ye?" said the housekeeper, with a proper sense of the liberty — at the same time placing her own hand peremptorily, as she supposed, on Mall's.

"I didn't touch yer shooder, ma'am," began the girl, but was interrupted by a squawl from Mrs. Gillyflower, and "Daratta! what's that?"

The tiny toes that rested on her shoulder were in her grasp, instead of Mall's fingers. Mall echoed Mrs. Gillyflower's exclamation with a scream, as she beheld the same false hand for a moment on the old woman's shoulder; and she bounced to the door with another bawl, where Martha clutched her with her right hand, hardly knowing what she did, with a "By Jen!" and a prayer.

A laugh — and down jumped the girlish stranger from the top of the old-fashioned low bedstead where she had been hiding.

"Ye did not see my shoes and stockings; I hid them in the bed, and my cloak is up there."

The girl was laughing heartily, and looked so merry and pretty, that if you had been there you would certainly have laughed with her.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillyflower, with the indignation of fright. "Of all the turns ye've ever served me, this is the warst!"

What the other ill-turns may have been it would, perhaps, have puzzled our good old friend to recount.

"To think o' yer treatin' me sa! I wouldn't a' believed the parson. Na, na, na, — nane o' that," die said, waving off the laughing girl. "Na, na — I've done wi' ye. I did na think 'twas in ye. What a naflin' I was, to care tuppence about ye! Ye've sarved me right, and, bout in the way o' civility, I'll never speak word more till ye. I've done wi' ye — I've done wi' ye quite!"

She had turned with dignity, and her hand was on the door, when the girl caught her.

"No, no — not a bit; ye'll never have done with me. Ye'll kiss me before ye go out, and we'll dance together, you and me; for you're my darling always, and I'll be yours again."

"To think o' ye playin' at peeping-hide, like a child! — there, don't be a fool, let me go — and to give me that fright! Don't ye be holdin' me — let go, I desire."

But all wouldn't do. The girl, with bare feet, laughing merrily, and not a bit daunted, pulled her out by the substantial waist, and, singing a meny tune, whisked the old lass round in spite of herself.

"Ye let me go, miss, if ye please — tak' yer hands away. I'm not going; I won't, miss — we're na' that intimate."

But on went the song, and round and round sails the good lady, protesting; and the girl — didn't she look roguish, wild, and pretty? — capered such pretty steps on her bare feet, that at last old Martha's dignity broke down, and, perhaps from the very effort to look grave, she burst out laughing, and never was the dance so wild as then.

"I don't care," screamed Martha. "I'm very angry, though I may be laughin'; and I'll tell ye what— "

But her laughter increased, and grew at last so continuous and uproarious, that it was vain contending with it; so giving herself up, she danced with her own goodwill, and set to her pretty partner, with her fat old arms "akimbo," and tears of laughter, in the general chorus, running down her ruddy cheeks. And at last, all laughing, they came to a standstill, and old Martha said, panting:

"Go to bed — I'm the biggest fool o' the whole lot!"

And she gave the girl a kiss on the cheek, and a little slap, and ran out of the room at a trot.



## CHAPTER XII.

### FORTUNETELLERS.

NEXT DAY at eleven o'clock, quite contrary to his bookish custom, William took his rod and flies, and pulled on his huge fishing-boots. Four miles he had to walk before he could cast his flies on the trout-stream; but he had not reached the hedgerow of the first field that lies within the evening shadow of the gables of Haworth Hall, when he heard the sweet voice of the stranger, singing. The song, that came clear from the leafy distance over the field, was the same which he had heard from the wooded slopes by Dardale Moss, and the same rich voice trembled in the air:

"The haw thorn-tree  
Is dear to me,  
The elver-stone likewise —  
The lonely air  
That lingers there,  
And thought that never dies."

He listened till the song was sung out, and its last sweet and melancholy note died away. And then, with a long sigh, he said: "I thought so. Yes, I thought the voice was the same, and now I know it. When I heard that song, I knew that I heard the call of fate; I would follow it over the world!"

Lightly he strode to the tall trees and thicket that are grouped at the point from which the song was audible. And now he could see her, though his view was interrupted by the hanging bough that interposed. She was sitting on a stile, leaning lightly on the ivy-grown stem of a great ash-tree, and with a little dog sitting beside her, to which she was talking gayly.

She ceased her prattling on seeing William through the screen of leaves, and as she saw him turn from the path and approach, she stepped down upon the grass.

"I heard your song," said William. "You were sitting on the stile, among that ivy, with that spray of sweetbrier nodding over your shoulders. You see I lost nothing. They call you 'Sweetbrier,' as you won't help them to another name, and I think it so wild and pretty. I shall never ask your real name; when you like to tell me, if ever that time comes, I shall be very happy. I heard your song, and I could not resist turning aside. For, one evening, as I was trudging over the moss, dull and lonely enough, a different sort of fellow from what I have grown to be, I heard that very song before, little knowing what was coming. I love that song, and it makes me sad, and

"The hawthorn-tree  
Is dear to me,  
The elver-stone likewise."

For, when I think of the song, I always see the hawthorn-tree and the old stone where I saw you first; and I'll never forget them, or the song, or that evening. I came just to tell you who has sent me to fish in the Dwyle, four miles away; and I'll go tomorrow, with my gun, across the moss. I'll give up my books — I think I do little good over them now. It is easy to keep one's eyes upon the page, but who will tie the fancy there? And the more I think of it, the more I love the idea of the wild free life. And I'm going all the way, I said, to-day and tomorrow, and everyday, thinking of you — just because you told me — just in the hope to please you." He lowered his voice as he spoke.

"Whatever's best for yourself, sir, you will know. I'm only a poor girl, and can't tell what will answer gentlefolk," she replied, in a low tone, and in that odd grave way, which somehow chilled and, in a manner, awed him.

William's conventual theories had been strengthened by one or two trifles told him by old Martha respecting their guest. First on Friday she had eaten no meat. Secondly, she had described some odd circumstances about the burial of "her sister" — a sister, more probably, William thought. A circular piece of silk, bound with ribbons of red and blue, was laid over her heart; a gospel, or "scapular" (as William concluded), and a white cloth was placed on her feet, and a white cap, of a peculiar shape, on her head; and some of the things that had belonged to her were solemnly burnt. He would have given a great deal for a book, or a learned friend, in his solitude, to satisfy him upon his theory that all this indicated the costume and practice of some conventual order.

And further — proving how little worth was that crucial test which he fancied he was applying — she had told old Martha, with an odd little laugh, that she had never been in a Church-of-England place of worship before, but that "there was no harm in it, for her mother had *once* been in one." With a dispensation he was satisfied they might anywhere.

Then there was that in her manner that was very peculiar, when she wished him to understand that he was to stand aloof — something proud, gentle, dignified, which was his very ideal of the nun-like.

"Some time or other, perhaps, you will tell me your name," he said, "but that is a sign, you say, of confidence, and may be a long way off; but I have an old entreaty to plead again. You called me 'Sir.' Now, if you won't call me by my name, don't at least call me *that*; but why not call me 'Willie,' as Martha does? I'll only ask it when we are alone, just as we are now; and if I could make any one so happy by so slight a thing, why won't you?"

"Well, there — Willie — Willie — Willie," she repeated, very sweetly, with a silence between each time; and there was a little laugh running lowly through it, but something for a moment almost fond in the tone and look.

"You've said it. I thought you never would. I wish I could tell how grateful I am to you. Oh, wonderful stranger! I wish I could see into the future."

She laughed. "Where's the good? Why should the coming time be happier than the past? Rich folks look sour enough often, and lords and ladies ain't always pleasantest."

"I wish I could believe in gypsies," said William. "I'd ride twenty miles to have my fortune told, but I'm not likely to meet them here; they never come this way. You've had your fortune told, I daresay?"

"Well — no," said the girl. "Well, you've very likely heard others told theirs, and seen the whole thing?"

"Oh, very often," answers she, gayly.

"I wish I could believe in it," said he. "I've heard of very curious things they've told — things that came out quite true — and also what they told people about their past lives. I think you are a believer. How do you think they make it all out?"

"By the planets, and the lines on the hand, and the lines on the forehead."

"Will you tell my fortune?" said William Haworth, smiling.

"I will," said she, quietly. "You cross my hand with silver."

And so he did, still smiling; and she took the coin gravely, and dropping it into her pocket she took his hand, and held it, looking sometimes for a moment at its palm, and then, long and gravely, in his face.

William would have liked to listen to his fortune so told for the whole day long; and speaking low and fluently, and standing near his side, she said: —

"Although you are young, you have had sorrow, and you sometimes think to yourself it has done you good. You think you are better and wiser than if you had never known grief — d'ye mind what I say? You do not care for a great many people, but them you do like you like well and long. You are very true-hearted — d'ye mind what I say? — and you never were very much in love, but only a trifle; and one was dark, and there was another, with light hair and blue eyes — d'ye mind what I say? But the greatest love's to come yet and the one that will last all your days — do you mind what I say? But you are very true, and will be married well to a lady that thinks a great deal of you — do you mind what I say? — and is very rich, and you'll come to be a very great man, and you'll have a great estate; and although you think you're going to India, you'll never go there — d'ye mind what I say? — and you'll come to be a great man, here, at home, in England, and you'll live long. And now put your hand in your pocket, and take any money you like in it and wish — that will do. You will suffer a good deal before three years are over, but after that you will be very happy; and you will see the lady then, for the first time, that you are to marry, and— "

"That will do; you are breaking down now. You began very well," he laughed, and shook his head. "But no — I must go to the real gypsies to have my future told. You *did* guess my poor story — my past life — very well; you are so clever, you do everything well; but now you have predicted that which can *never* be — a sheer impossibility. No — I must *tell your* fortune. Let me try — won't you?"

She smiled; for a moment, her little white teeth appeared, and she extended her slender hand, and he took it.

"Cross your hand with silver," said she, and she restored William's shilling.

So he held her hand, and he looked in her face — looked in her face, and held her hand — in a dream. Never was man so near speaking madness, but he did not: —

"You are a young lady, who parted with her nearest relations on earth, to find nearer in heaven, and who discovered, almost too late, that she had forsaken friends for tyrants, hope for despair, and liberty for a prison. You can repeat more Latin on your knees than many a Cambridge or Oxford man can upon his feet. You have discovered that silence is not quiet, nor solitude content. You found that you had exchanged a mother for a stepmother, and a home for a penitentiary. You have yielded more duty and found less love, and you have grown more wise and less patient. You have turned away in time from a dark and cruel mistake, and returned to light and duty. There are many people who admire you, and feel an interest in you, and there is one who loves you — a poor fellow, very lonely, not very happy, very little worth a thought or care of yours, except for that. He loves you — he thinks that no such creature ever saw the light before; he would lay down his life for you, and he holds your little hand in his, and he is where he would always be — by your side."

"You've told my fortune all wrong, sir," she said, withdrawing her hand; "it is all as far away as the sea."

What was it in that tone and manner that was so magical? To him it seemed that an invisible curtain had dropped between them. No vulgar airs, no toss of the head, no affected scorn, were there. Nothing could be quieter, more gentle, sadder even; her head was high, but her eyes were lowered. All was proud, cold, melancholy. Nothing was there in tone or look the least unkind, yet what could be more peremptory?

He had promised there should be no such talk. He had broken his word, and she had called him "Sir." He was horribly confounded and ashamed, and full of silent self-reproach.

"I've broken my promise. I've done very wrong. I've talked like a fool, but you must make it up. You'll shake hands — won't you — and say we are friends again?"

"Oh yes, sir," she said, and they shook hands and parted. And William went away with a heart beating fast — troubled.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BLACK PULLET.

"When will Mrs. Gillyflower come home?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, by nightfall."

"Well, and you say the master will be home by sunsetting too. The shadows are stretching, lass, and the air a little sharp; the Squire will be a hungry man by the time he comes back. What have ye for his supper?"

It was the red round of beef, and potatoes — dinner and supper, all in one. "Come, we'll give him a better supper than that — a bit of hot meat Go you and kill a fowl."

The girl protested, in her broad north-country patois. "

"Go, Mall — do as I bid ye," repeated the guest "She'll be stark starin' mad!" expostulated Mall.

"Go you and kill the fowl; I'll take the blame myself; there shan't a wry word fall on you."

"But," reasoned the girl, "it should a' bin killed; it would be too soon to roast it."

"He'll not be home for three hours. Leave that to me. I'll show you how to dress it — and he'll say he never eat one half so good before. Go you — talk no more, but kill the fowl; and come back quick to me, and I'll tell you what to do next."

There was a cool high tone here that Mall, somehow, could not disobey.

Never was cooking so odd. So very strange, indeed, was the process that I had better describe it.

Mall, indeed, expostulated — sometimes in profound anxiety as to what would follow when Mrs. Gillyflower, having returned, discovered the unauthorized slaughter of the pullet — and then aghast at the astounding directions imposed by the damsel who had taken the command of the kitchen in the absence of old Martha. Sometimes Mall would stand agape, and gasp "Agoy!" or "By Jen!"

Sometimes, half frightened, she would look perplexed, in her face — thinking that their eccentric guest had gone stark daft — and sometimes bursting into irrepressible screams of laughter, till, as she said, she "clean kinkt wi' laughin'!" She lost all power, for a time, either to resist or to obey.

This curious procedure took place, to make it odder still, not in the kitchen, but in the little field, close to the gate of the yard, under the trees, in the open air.

The imperious beauty there compelled Mall to scoop out a little hollow in the ground with a spade. In this she kindled a fire of peat and sticks. That done, she ordered Mall, aiding herself with great solicitude, to twist a strong rope of straw.

The next step reduced Mall, with sheer convulsions of laughter, almost to a fainting condition. The bird, with all its feathers on, was wound up in this Straw-rope, so that nothing but a sort of ball of straw appeared. It was next covered up in the hot ashes, which had by this time accumulated in the hole, and the peat and wood fire was heaped up, round and upon it. After this she made Mall take the potatoes she had washed for boiling, and, instead of placing them in a pot, carry them out to the fire in the field; and there she buried them — one here, another there — in the embers, in serene contempt of Mall's terrified expostulations and screams of laughter.

"And mind ye, I cook the dinner today; and if I see your potato-pot on the fire, I'll break it with one whack of the poker; and ye'll do just as I bid ye, neither more nor less, Mall Darrell."

When these preparations were accomplished, the young lady's solicitude seemed at an end, and she was able to converse on indifferent matters with her accustomed passion or levity.

She sat down on the grass near the fire, now a glowing, smouldering heap. She had the dog and the cat out to keep her company (for she loved pets), and the cage of the bullfinch on her knee; and to these companions she talked and whistled, while Mall made her more rational dispositions in the kitchen.

Then the girl would return to have a peep at the bonfire, and fall again into Shrieks of laughter. And the young priestess of this strange sacrifice would make her sit down on the grass beside her; and she would sing her a song, or tell her a story of a murder in Epping Forest, or of two horses and a tipsy dealer drowned one snowy night in a flooded ford, or of the woman's ghost that was seen nursing and fondling the neglected child in the lonely tent. She grew into great spirits — wild spirits — beside this extemporized fire, and sang again and danced on the grass; and after a time, on a sudden, she grew sad, and she said:

"If we did right, Mall, we'd let that poor little bird go." She had the cage again on her knee, by this time, and was looking, through the wires at the bird.

"Hoot, lass! I's no sa awpy as firtle in any such lids. If Mrs. Gillyflower came home and tound her wee bird fled — woe werth Mall! Be ma sang, she'd be stark beside hersel'!"

Mall, having seen the holocaust of the fowl, believed the strange girl capable of anything.

"I like pets — all my people do. I had a squirrel called 'Jacka,' and a green parrot; it died, pool little thing, and I buried it near Wyndale, in Derbyshire, under the middle tree of the three hawthorns that grow on the moor's side, just at the turn of the brook. I was sick crying after it Lussha Lee had a pet fox, that frightened it, I think, and it died It would call me by my name; and it slept every day on its stick, after its dinner, not with its head under its wing, but just like an old gorgio, and its chin on its breast I'd have a parrot for a pet, or any outlandish bird that don't live wild here; but these small things, when they see their companions and the green leaves, don't you believe but their little hearts is sore — they're looking for the old life? And, Mall, will ye miss me when I'm gone? I'll be often thinking of ye all, and the pleasant fields of Haworth."

"Ye're no gangin' yet, lass, and I'll no greet till sorrow comes," said Mall, heartily.

The stranger laughed kindly.

"Hark! — hear! The birds are all singing. The chimney shadow is away as far as Hazelden wolds; and Mrs. Gillyflower will be coming home again, and then the Squire. Is all ready, lass? Run and see, and trim the fire; the frost is coming, and all is ready

here.”

And with the tip of her strong but tidy shoe she poked the edge of the ashes.

Mall had hardly returned, when Mrs. Gillyflower appeared; and her handmaid’s heart sunk, as she thought of the murdered pullet and the unboiled potatoes and saw Martha, who was not to be trifled with, descend from the taxcart before it reached the yard-gate, and cross the low’ stile, and stump over the sward towards the smouldering bonfire.

“Now mind, ye sid ye wod na let her flite me,” whispered Mall, in awful trepidation.

“Never you fear,” said the girl; and before Mrs. Gillyflower had quite reached them, the stranger called:

“I’m glad ye’re come home, ma’am; there has been sad doings. What do you think? Somebody has stolen the black pullet, Mrs. Gillyflower — what do ye think o’ that?”

“Stolen the black pullet!” echoed Mrs.

Gillyflower, coming to a standstill, and looking herself as black as the pullet.

“Tell her it’s there — can’t ye?” whispered Mall, in her agony.

“Ay, burnt to a cinder; why, it’s all afire, ye fool, like a bit o’ peat!” whispered the stranger, scornfully.

“Ay! it’s gone — ay, the black pullet” (blacker than ever) she said, aside to Mall.

“And what’s the fire here for?” exclaimed Mrs. Gillyflower, breaking again into speech.

“We were terrible cold, ma’am.”

“And why not sit be the kitchen-fire — what’s the matter wi’ ye all?”

“Why, Mall let it out, and we were almost famished. The cat’s come out, and the dog, and the bird even.”

“La! But, ma’am — “ broke in Mall.

“And whaar’s the pittayties for supper?” gasped Mrs. Gillyflower, with her hand pugilistically raised, and a stamp of distraction. “Whaar’s the pittayties?”

“Well,” said the stranger, “I do suppose they’re where they were, for there’s none in the pot, though I told her she’d get into a row about them — I did.”

“Aw! la! Look at ye — weel!” broke out the betrayed Mall.

“The black pullet gone, and narra pittayta!” exclaimed the old lady, with both her open hands thrown back in distraction. “If I had a souple-jack in my hand, wouldn’t I ken whaar to lay it Don’t ye stand there ogglin’ like a gowk, ye strackle-brain’d scollops! Not a word out o’ yer head. I’ll hae nane o’ yer miff-maff here. Sarts! it’s bonny doings; fires out, and narra pittayta, and the best pou’t o’ the lot stole, and you sittin’ here croodlin’ in a scog! By my sang! it’s a good bevellin’ ye want, and if I had a widdy in my fist yer worse than nothin’. There’s the master cornin’, and wet and cold, and not a spark o’ fire in the study. If ever there was a rue-bargain, you’re ane; woe werth the day I saw yer foolish face! I can’t wait noo, but I’ll be talkin’ to ye i’ now.”

And with a florid complexion and angry brow away trotted she, to see after the Squire’s fire.

“He is coming — I see him down yonder by the hedge. See his flies, they’re caught in the bush,” said the stranger.

“Sit you here while I run in for the things.”

Away she ran, leaving Mall confounded and sore at the treatment she had received. And in a minute more she returned with two dishes and two tin covers, and a great knife and fork, and a huge cloth.

First from the glowing ashes forth came the potatoes, cased in their hard-baked skins, like roasted chestnuts; and well rubbed in the cloth and placed in the dish, did ever potatoes look so tempting?”

Mall began to feel happier. Next, in its thick black crust of burnt straw and feathers, emerged the fowl. Off came this crust, and never had Mall seen or dreamed of so savory and appetizing a dish as was now before her.

“By Jen!” gasped Mall Darrell, with a broad grin, and eyes jumping out of her head.

“Didn’t I tell you to do just as I bid you, and all would be well? And I told you to kill the black pullet because Mrs. Gillyflower was thinking this morning she’d a’ killed it, only she thought it would not a’ been a cold evening, but I knew better. Come, you bring in the pullet, and I’ll bring the potatoes, and ye’ll see how pleased she’ll be.”

And so she was, and forgave them both; and laughed and wondered, and wondered and laughed, and called the blackeyed stranger a “naughty pack;” and she told William the history of that eccentric cookery — how it was done in a bonfire, in a nook of the hedge, by the big ash-tree, under the open sky.

Nothing better was ever eaten: epicures would do well to try it

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE KNIGHT IN THE SADDLE.

NEXT morning it was Tuesday — the fair-day of Willarden. William had boasted to his young guest that he would take his gun, and walk half round the moss in search of game.

Instead of doing this, at daybreak he mounted his horse and rode away toward the old Northumbrian town of Willarden.

There was a light and pleasant autumnal frost in the air as the sun rose over the landscape, and showed sharply for a while the distant peaks of the fells of Golden Friars. The Squire was riding away from Haworth, and the scenery before him was wild and picturesque. Long stretches of light sward, with gray rocks peeping through, and masses of fern and furze, made a breezy undulating outline — steep enough at times, and relieved every here and there with groups of dwarf oak, and birch, and thorn.

This scenery though never beautiful, is always cheery, and sometimes even pretty. To William it seemed prettier than it had ever looked before. What way ever seemed dull to the man whose head is full of the beautiful imagery of romance, and who is speeding, in the way of his knight-errantry, on the service of his ladylove?

Exploit more foolish, passion more romantic, never animated the enterprise of gallant knight, in the days of prowess and beauty, than that which the breast of the Squire of Haworth harbored, as he rode over the wide plain that separated his hall from the fair-green of Willarden. We shall see how he sped.

As you approach Willarden, the character of wildness and loneliness, which gives its peculiar charm to the scenery, does not diminish. Wide slopes and gentle hollows swell and dip softly, showing shallow scaurs of gray rock here and there, traced in broken lines, like timeworn and fantastic battlements and fortifications; and through the crannies twisted hawthorn-trees stoop wildly, and birch-trees in twos and threes crown their summits.

These picturesque but hungry pastures, with their thin close grass and wavy fern, and hoar rocks peeping through, are browsed by scattered sheep of some old Northumbrian breed, small and agile, who seldom lie down to repose, like their fatter cousins of the South — can gallop far and lightly, and climb the rocks like goats. These sheep crop diligently the thin but sweet herbage which more highly-bred animals would despise, and are doubtless the descendants of those harried animals who made so many forced marches, this way and that, across the border, and saw the steel caps, lances, and shaggy ponies of the Scottish rieurs.

And now, at last, the quaint little town of Willarden appears in view, as William Haworth reaches the summit of a long low undulation.

There four narrow roads meet — or, if you will, two long lines of road cross — the little town clumping itself upon and about the point of union. Stone houses with steep gables, look in the distance as if planted at random, as a child places dominoes. There was some tillage near; corn stood in stooks and stacks, orchards and gardens made an irregular girdle about its walls; and the gray spire, with its gilded vane, glimmered pleasantly in the early sun, with a background of statelier foliage.

Cattle and carts were still pouring into the town as William approached, and the picture, without the sounds of bustle, was pleasant in the distance.

As you draw near, the scene loses something of its gentler charm, and that which was a picture becomes instinct with the character and vulgarity of actual life. Now you hear laughter and bawling and women's prattle, the cries of the cattle-drovers. There are a few late carts and wagons making their way through Church Street to the fair-green. Cows are driving this way and that, with their horns low, on the same route; and sheep and horses and pigs are still moving in the same direction.

William draws bridle at the porch of the "Goat in Boots;" people are going in and out through the crowd, and two broad fellows, whom William has to shove asunder, already deep in a bargain about three cows. They both look shrewd and dogged — I wonder which will have the best of it. On such days, with the flurry and flush of excitement all about, who would recognize the silent little inn of all the rest of the year?

William is hicky to find a nook in which to eat his breakfast. A fat hearty fellow, with a shrewd hale face, wearing leather breeches and topboots, a long red waistcoat and a blue cutaway with brass buttons, clapped his big hand on William's shoulder, with a grin, and greeted him with a salutation:

"Ech! Willie Haworth — is thou here, lad? And how's a' wi' thee? Thou's summat late, though. I a' selt my kye weel, an hour sin'."

And he laughed and wagged his head.

"Glad to see you, Dick. Mind you come down again this winter to Haworth, to the duck-shooting. I'll have your corner by the fire, and your pipe and your mug ready; and you'll stay a week, and bring your retriever, the best dog I ever saw — and I'll take no excuse. So that's settled."

Dick laughed a huge laugh. "Maybe — who kens?" he responded joyously. "Thou's sellin' or buyin'?" he inquired, thinking that the young Squire might be pleasant to deal with either way.

"No; I have no business here except to look after a rogue."

"Agoy! Weel — what more?" said Dick.

"Only, as you've nothing better to do, you'll come with me and see the fun. I'm going to send him out o' the county, and he won't like it; and there will be a jolly row, I daresay."

"Thou's a justice, noo. Thou'll be givin' him a jerkin' o' stean. One raggard the less. I'll lend ye a hand, but there's constables if need be, and thou'll hev the warrant in thy pocket."

"Come then, Dick. We'll go down to the fair-green; I like your company — that's a glorious cudgel you've got!"

"Well, it do drive connily; a skelp o' that wud make yer lug sing."

"So I think. Come, let's be off." So down Church Street the Squire of Haworth and Dick Hoggen the yeoman — a man of cattle, money, and mark in those regions — made their way; and over the narrow bridge, with its now roofless guard-tower, and so into the pretty fair-green of Willarden.

## CHAPTER XV.

### COWPER.

HERE were, of course, the proper scenery and furniture of a fair-green — tents and booths, merry-go-rounds, “Aunt Sally,” wheels of fortune, Rocks of Scilly, thimblery and stacks of gingerbread, and horses and other quadrupeds. The “Step in, ladies and gentlemen!” of the polite showman resounded, and the milder invitation to the peep-show, and the jokes of Mr. Merryman; the big drum and trumpet thundered, the merry squeak of the fiddle was heard, and the stentorian “saucy Arethusa” of the two British sailors, in the usual mutilated condition of that gallant service, mingling now and then with the screaming of a refractory pig. All these sights and sounds failed to divert William from his purpose. He carried about with him two remarkable and very distinct pictures. He was looking about sharply for the originals, and was so absorbed in his search as to lose much of Dick Hoggen’s agreeable conversation.

His scrutiny was not rewarded. It was now twelve o’clock. I don’t know how it is now, but in those days there was a toll collected at the entrance to the fair-green. To the man who received this money William put some questions.

To the best of his recollection he had seen no such men that day; and certainly no such person as the tall young man whom William described had brought a gray and a chestnut horse into the fair.

William was disappointed. He and his friend Dick strolled up again to the “Goat in Boots,” and had some luncheon. On a sudden a direful thought dawned on the young Squire’s mind.

What if these two miscreants had been spying out his plans, and in his absence had made a descent upon Haworth Hall, and carried off his ladylove — to be immured, perhaps, in a convent? Who could say where Clinton might be, with the farm to look after? Possibly two miles away at the forge! What an awful fool he (William Haworth) was! He had left her, in fact, to the protection of an old woman and a simple girl, with two wily kidnappers on her track. If they happened to have found a clue to her present refuge, how frightful might prove the consequences of his blunder!

It was now one; he told the people to saddle his horse forthwith, but, on second thoughts, he resolved to visit the fair-green once more, in quest of the villains whom he had come in pursuit of.

And now, it was past one o’clock. Dick Hoggen — who had played at most of the games on the green, had his fling at Aunt Sally, and peeped into the shows — was now for mounting and overtaking the sheep he had bought, which were already some way on their march to Crink Farm.

“Come down once more to the green, Dick; and if there’s still no news of my rogues, we’ll say good-by.”

So — down they went, and at the gate the man told William: “There has been a gray and a chestnut in since, and a tall greyhoundy chap, gypsy-like, w’ ‘em.”

“Thank you,” said William, with a pleasant nod; “I’m looking for a gray. Which way did he go?”

“Right in — right fomit — right atort the middle o’ the green. I’ve no kennin noo, though — there’s such a jumlement here.”

“Thanks,” William smiled, and nodded again.

He nodded and smiled, but there was the sudden thrill and suspense of coming battle at his heart — he had resolved on an exploit. His eye, as it searched the crowd, was brighter, his face paler and sterner, his step more resolute, and in a sudden silence his talk with honest Dick came untimely to an end.

On reaching a part of the green a little less crowded, he saw a figure — the most barbarous, perhaps, he had ever seen before on English ground; he thought he recognized the outline which his guest had given him — he had found his game.

This was an old square man, with the swarthiest face he had ever seen, broad-furrowed and forbidding, with long soot-black hair, a thick lock of which was brought straight down at each side before his ears. He had jet-black large eyes, the fire of which was sinister in sockets so lined and wrinkled. He wore a high-crowned broad-brimmed felt hat, such as Germans sometimes affect; he had a short chocolate-colored coat, and a sky-blue waistcoat — both faded and worn at the seams — and a pair of trousers, the lower parts of which were thrust into a pair of old topboots, which, in deep brown wrinkles, hung lower than the calves of his legs.

This strange figure, pacing up and down a short bit of sward, was totally alone, and twisting an oak cudgel, of about a yard long, by the middle — seemed without object or occupation.

A stranger or more savage figure he had never seen. It might have been taken for a Zamiel, or the smoked idol of some infernal worship, or a child’s ideal of an ogre.

“Keep beside me now,” said William Haworth to his friend; “I may want to borrow your cudgel.”

“I say, Cowper!” cried William.

The swarthy old man turned on his heel, and, stopping short, confronted the young Squire, fixing on him his glare from under his savage brows. At the same time he shifted his hold of his cudgel, and planted the end of it on the ground.

“Ho! who wants me? — I’m Cowper,” said he, in a hard loud voice.

“Where’s the young fellow that came with you?” said William. “I’m told he has horses to sell, and his gray might answer me.”

“You’ll see ‘em there,” said the old man, indicating the direction with a prod of his cudgel.

“Where? — in a booth?”

“Ye can see a gray horse in daylight, I — expect.”

William laughed. “I’ll try,” said he.

“On this ground a man and his nag won’t be far apart,” growled the man with the cudgel. “The lad will be having a pot o’ swipes, mayhap.” And the old fellow turned again, swaggered up and down his beat once more, twirling his cudgel in the same singular fashion.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### LUSSHA SINFIELD.

RICHARD HOGGEN had grinned with much interest over this brief dialogue, and accompanied William with right goodwill, as he made his search for the man with the horses.

Coming round the corner of a booth suddenly, a tall bony slender fellow, riding a chestnut horse and leading a gray, was before them.

He was a handsome young man, very swarthy, with oval face, lowering forehead, black eyes, and black hair; about his neck, in a single tie, so that its ends hung loose and long, was that green-and-red handkerchief which he had noted in the description. He wore a wideawake hat, a gray coat with gilt buttons, a good deal worn at the seams, a red waistcoat, white corduroy knee-breeches, and brown leather gaiters.

William made a step forward and raised his hand; the man pulled up.

"Selling that gray?" asked William.

"Ay — d'ye like him?" said the man. "Can't say till I look at him. Old Cowper told me I should find you about here. You're Lussha Sinfield, ain't you?"

"Ay," said the man, boldly, but he eyed them suspiciously. "I'm the man. All the world's welcome to look at me, and the horse too. Nothing to hide: he's a beauty!"

"Has he been hunted?"

"Half last season; a lamb to handle — a devil to run. Jumps all slick — bar, ditch, or stonewall, all one to Faa; takes all sweet; beautiful trained. Look at his hoofs — just like a marble. Never made a mistake since he was dropped. Pedigree, points, action, training — not another's been on this turf this six year like him. Try him yourself — you know a horse. Will ye come a bit this way? — and Mister Cowper will hold the chestnut."

It was really a nice horse, William thought, with fine action. But he was not troubling his head much about horses. His business was of another sort.

"Well, come on, it's close by," said William, pointing toward the spot where he had left the old swarthy savage twirling his cudgel.

As they walked on, William Haworth's companion jogged him under his ribs, and mumbled his critical remarks on the horse, into his ear: a caution upon this point, a hint upon that, but a general admission that "the beast was no' that bad." And all the time the horseman, with his lids dropped, as if he was looking at the grass at his horse's hoof, was reading, through the long fringe of his eyelashes, with a practised skill, the countenances and bearing of these two friends, and he truly saw in William's that which dissatisfied and even alarmed him.

But Lussha Sinfield knew very well how he stood. "He need not care a curse for any one." He had little secrets, of course, of his own — something more than most men, but they were secrets. There was nothing that could turn up about him. "He did not care a d — n."

Cowper was now in sight, and he beckoned to him.

"Take the halter," said he quietly, and Cowper — than whom, as I have said, no fitter representative for the forest-demon in "Der Freyschütz" ever strode on earth — took the rope in his hand.

William Haworth was standing a little away, so as to take in the whole figure of the horse.

"He stands over his knees," says William.

"A good judge would think that a perfection, rather than otherwise," answered Sinfield, coolly.

"I take leave to think differently," says William, sharply.

"Every man to his taste," says the dealer, coolly.

"And, besides that, I think his shoulder too straight for a hunter, and his hindlegs too far away from him."

"If those points were better than they are," answers the man, with a scornful smile, "I'd be asking a hatful more than ninety pounds for him. But never mind that — the proof of the pudding is in the eating. You'd better see him over a few fences."

"I don't mind," says the Squire.

"Hollo, Jonnie!" cries the man, raising his arm, and a slight boy, blackeyed and blackhaired, with dark-brown skin, runs up to his side.

"That's a gypsy lad," says Dick Hoggen, struck by the peculiar physique of the boy.

"By my soul, he's not!" answers Sinfield, fiercely. "That's a clever boy, though. Now, Jonnie, take him over that bar."

A few steps brought them to the bar. The little fellow sits light as a fly on the horse's back, and, without fuss or excitement, the horse goes over.

"That will do; and what do you say to that double ditch?" says William, pointing to the fence of the fair-green close by them.

"Take him over that," says Lussha Sinfield to the boy, and the horse goes over the fence.

"What do you say to that? You saw how he changes his legs," said the dealer.

"He goes out of his tracks," says William.

The man answers with a derisive laugh.

"Take him over that again," he says, and over goes the horse.

"Bring the horse down here a bit, to the wall," says Sinfield. "Now take him over the wall for the Squire."

And over the wall he goes.

"See that!" cries Sinfield.

"What?" says the Squire.

"What!" echoes Sinfield. "Why, how he stands out, and sails over it. What! Ha — ha!"

"I say it's bad jumping," says William, coolly; "why, he runs under and bucks over. A hunter, you say!"

"That gentleman there," says Sinfield, pointing to Dick, and beginning to lose temper, "has an eye in his head, and knows what belongs to a horse. What do you say, sir?"

Dick screwed one eye close, and looked hard at the horse with the other. The dealer was on the point of citing the old distich: "Who winks with one eye and looks with the other, I would not trust him though he were my brother."

He did not quite know what to make of them, so, on the whole, he chose to try a little longer.

"Take him over the wall again," said Sinfield. And over went the gray, as before.

"Will ye try him?"

"I don't mind," answered William.

He mounts, and excited the horse with whip and spur, and gallops him round the empty upper end of the green, and pulls him up suddenly before the seller, who is growing angry.

"What the d — I do you mean by bucketing my horse about that way?"

"D — n it! you asked me to try him, didn't you?"

"I didn't tell you to drive him mad, and knock him about that lick — did I? And what do you say to him, after all that? — what do you say now?"



## CHAPTER XVII.

### MEASURE WEAPONS.

“WELL, what do you say? What will you take?” said William Haworth.

“He’s dog-cheap at a hundred guineas. I’ll say ninety, and not a penny under.”

The man was holding the horse’s head; horse and man were fine types of their several species.

William laughed, quietly and scornfully.

The man fixed a fiery stare on him. “Ay, and what do you say?” he asked.

Digitized by “What do I say? I’ve a good deal to say. You are Lussha Sinfield, and I’ve heard enough about you to help me to value your horse. I’ve no doubt he’s a cheat, and five pounds is too much for him;” and William laughed again contemptuously.

Sinfield turned pale under his swarthy skin; his brow lowered darker, and fire gleamed from his black eyes on William. He stands without motion for some seconds, like the statue of an evil spirit.

“You d — d gorgio!” he yelled, “you haven’t five pounds in the world.”

And, stamping, he broke into an extravagance of fury, of shrieking curses and abuse, gesticulating as if he was hurling handfuls of dust at William into the air. The effect of this frantic exhibition was increased by the rearing and plunging of the startled horse, which he held with his left hand by the bridle, which forced him to caper and spring, this way and that, by its struggles.

“Take the horse, and give me the cudgel!” he shouted to Cowper.

“Lend me your cudgel, Dick,” said William to his companion, who was utterly puzzled by the mad scene; and at the same time he grasped the weapon.

“A ring — a ring!” shouted the crowd, that had already begun to collect.

“Ay, a ring,” cries William Haworth, sternly. “I’ll fight that fellow, if he dares; I’ll drive him out of our county.”

“Will ye try the cudgel, ye d — d thief?” screamed the horse-dealer.

“Ay, I don’t care.”

Sinfield made a spring into the air, and twirled the heavy stick he held by the middle; then off went his coat and his waistcoat, and old Cowper rolled them tight together, and strapped them to the saddle; off went Sinfield’s hat, and off went his green-and-crimson handkerchief, which he tied instead tight about his small black head. There stands the handsome athlete, with this bright headgear, in his shirt and “shorts” and gaiters, looking so lowing and malignant.

He made his stick spin in the air as his black eyes gleamed on William. Light, long of limb, all bone and sinew, a very formidable adversary looked this champion, who had killed his man in fair fight with the selfsame tough bit of ash, and left his mark scarred on many a valorous youth — being, in fact, a highly skilled master of that weapon.

Every fellow who has not seen a good single-stick play fancies he can guard himself and hit another well enough to hold his own in a fight, and feels safe enough if he has a good stick in his hand. A little experience will open his eyes, if it does not close them.

“I back myself to win — five pounds,” said Lussha Sinfield.

“Done!” cried William.

“I’ll make it ten,” rejoined Sinfield.

“Done, again!” said William. “We’ll stake the money with Mr. Hoggen, here — Mr. Richard Hoggen; every one knows Mr. Hoggen.”

“Aye, he’ll do: I’ve heard tell of Mr. Hoggen.”

“You’ll hold the stakes, won’t you, Dick?” asked William.

“I don’t mind,” said Dick; “but canst play? Have a care what you’re doing,” he whispered, with a wink.

“Well, I ought to know something about it; I was the best man at school at it, and, so far as I know, the best at Cambridge. I was worth something, I can tell you, in the town-and-gown rows; I used to knock them over like ninepins.”

“Well, I’ll take the money,” said Dick; “and we’ll keep a ring clear. Hollo! Dobbs! — Heyward! — Clewson! Come, lads, ye must keep a ring; get half-a-dozen more, and keep fair play. Here be the squire o’ Haworth goin’ to play a bout for the honor o’ the old county.”

Sinfield said a word to his comrade, taking the horses himself by their heads; and Cowper strode up to Dick Hoggen, and, with extended arm, held forth a £10 note, which honest Dick took with a careful scrutiny, folded, and, with ten sovereigns which William Haworth handed him, placed in his purse, and stuck into the lowest depth of his breastpocket.

“Now, mind ye don’t press in,” said Richard Hoggen, addressing the crowd. “If you don’t keep the ring you’ll spoil the fun, and stop the sport; and see, lads, the two foremost rows mun sit a t’ ground.”

William Haworth now threw off his coat, handed his watch to honest Dick Hoggen, and put off his waistcoat and hat; and instead of it, like his antagonist, tied a handkerchief tight about his head.

“Now we mun mezzur t’ sapplins,” said Dick; and on being placed together there was scarcely, as it turned out, a quarter of an inch difference in the length of the two sticks; and having satisfied himself that there was no loading in Sinfield’s, he pronounced the cudgels fair, and restored each to its owner for the occasion.

The ring was already formed; an ample area of smooth short turf awaited their tread, and the North-country folk who were lucky enough to be on Willarden Fair Green that day were about to see some very pretty play.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LOST AND WON.

"Now, mind ye," said Dick, in a loud voice, "I'm goin' to tell ye how the play mun be. It shan't last o'er an hour; and, won or drawn, it ends then. Every ten minutes I cry "*Over*," unless the play 's hot at the time, and then the players take five minutes' rest. An' if one tak's a skelp o' the other, and when time's ca'd he can't be up and to't, he's bet; but an' if it's a banger over f head, en he's floor'd, he has ten minutes' rest, in place of five, to cum till himsef. En noo, is beath pleased?"

"Ay!" cried Sinfield.

"All right!" said William.

"Weel, then, blitely lads, lig intul to't, noo!" shouted the yeoman, lifting his hand for a sign.

And, each eyeing his adversary closely, the two combatants stepped cautiously from opposite sides, with cudgels well-poised, towards one another.

And now the cudgels cross, and now come a few quick feints, and each player shows something more of caution. Each has formed, I suspect, a higher estimate of his antagonist.

William Haworth's face is stem; he is heart and soul in the battle. Victory is more to him than any one dreams; it is everything to him; he would sell Haworth, I am sure, to secure it. Pale with an intense anxiety, and stem, looks the blue-eyed Saxon Squire. His swarthy adversary, on the contrary, grins merrily, showing under his lowering brow and fiery eyes white rows of small teeth.

That fellow has the tricks of a prizefighter — this smiling or grinning for the groundlings, a trick to maintain confidence, and a good-humor. He has often played for money, one would conclude. The odds are awfully against the amateur.

Now comes a sudden break in this cautious play, and with beautiful rapidity cuts and parries whistle and rattle; and a heavy blow takes the horse-dealer across the leg, another at his head is parried, and he replies swiftly, and is met, in return, by a parry. They draw back a little, and the swarthy fellow laughs with all his glittering teeth.

Dick Hoggen looks at his watch, which is nestled snugly in his hand; it wants two minutes and a half still of the time at which he is to cry "*Over*!" His confidence in William has revived; and, judge of the lists though he be, he would like to call the five minutes' rest during which that resounding cut across the dark fellow's leg, just above the knee, would possibly stiffen and spoil his action.

But there remain two minutes still, and suddenly the dark fellow advances, and a very pretty and fierce bit of play follows instantly. "*Click-dack — click-clack*," with sightless speed and force the strokes and guards fly and meet. The ten minutes are up, but the play is at the moment too "*hot*" to be interrupted, in accordance with the articles.

The two minutes have passed, and on a sudden, with the sound of a stroke on a well-stretched sail, a single blow ended the "*round*."

You could hardly have seen who gave it or where it fell — all was so quick. But instantly William Haworth lay stretched on his back, looking up to the sky with a white sad face, and blood was trickling over his cheek and ear.

Well was it for William that his fall was so instantaneous, for his adversary followed it with a swinging swoop, that might have cut him across the temple, and ended his dream of love and glory.

Thus, by a few inches and a small fraction of a second he escaped, and folly and passion lived on; though, looking on the young fellow's face, some of the spectators feared he was dead. The cudgels with which they played were quite heavy enough for such a feat. It was soon evident, however, that the Squire was not in that predicament.

A broken head, pure and simple, is a trifle where the cudgel is a pastime — is no more matter than a broken pipe. William Haworth sat up. His friends stanchd the blood as well as they could; and as he was still giddy, "*daddled*" him, in Dick Hoggen's phrase, one at each side, across the arena.

Ten minutes rallying-time, according to agreement, was allowed William Haworth. He needed every second of it.

As William showed signs of recovery, his adversary frequently called to Dick Hoggen, "*How's time?*"

William was now on his legs, and his friend quietly advised his withdrawing from the contest, and so escaping the "*bevellin*" that awaited him.

"I'm all right again — thank you, old fellow. You quite mistake. He's a better man than I thought him, and I was too rash; but I know him now. The lesson was worth a knock, and I go in now to win, you'll see."

Sinfield, on the other hand, talked in an undertone, laughing, as he passed to and fro, to his companion; and the old fellow, fired by the combat and the sight of blood, jabbered fiercely in reply, and looked more horribly ugly than ever.

The fellows who had been sitting round on the grass stood up now, and a loud gabble was going on all round. When order was called, the ring was reformed; and, after a minute's hurry and hustle, all was right again, and the battle recommenced.

There is evidently more caution on each side. It is plain, after the first slight skirmish, that the Squire of Haworth had suffered nothing in hand or eye by his disaster. It is also plain that the dark fencer, who has drawn first blood, is resolved not to throw away his advantage, but to await his opportunity, and make his victory sure.

The Squire's hurt, oddly enough, proved in the end the cause of his safety. Thus it happened. Sinfield having trifled, and "*dodged*," and worried, with the intention of tiring a man who had lost some blood and sustained a shock, on a sudden makes a determined and formidable attack, and the Squire of Haworth is sorely pressed — is in danger — five to one, it seems, against him; and Sinfield's smile has vanished, and an atrocious glare and dark pallor unconsciously betray the animus with which he fights.

The people hold their breath; some in the first ranks stand up. Any instant may see the catastrophe, and at this moment Sinfield's foot slips: he has placed it in the little patch of blood which flowed from his adversary's wound. The slight

derangement that attends this accident William Haworth avails himself of; and instantly a resounding “skelp,” as they term such a blow in the North-country, proclaims to the world that Sinfield’s skull has “caught it” this time, and, as he reels, quick almost as you can clap your hands, two others follows, and tall lithe Lussha Sinfield lies, face downward, on the short grass, his small black head and green-and-scarlet handkerchief on his doubled arm, and the cudgel in which he trusted a yard away from his open hand. — , The crowd had now closed in about the fallen man; and foremost among the gabbling faces were the silent heads of the gray and the chestnut, pulled over by the powerful old gipsy, who had picked up the cudgel on his way in a trice, and who is violently roaring, stamping, and gesticulating, with the stick and the bridle clenched in his right hand, and the halter in his left; so that the horses are frightened, throwing up their heads and snorting in the air, and in danger of trampling on the feet of the crowd, who are shoving and hustling with them, and bawling to Cowper to mind his horses.

“It’s foul!” he is yelling. “He struck the man down! — he struck him foul! I don’t care a d — n! — he struck him down! I claim stakes for Sinfield! It’s all foul! I’ll fight him for double the money, I will, myself! — I’ll fight that chap myself if he’s the man! — I’ll fight him, double or quits; and Sinfield’s winner! — He struck foul! I’ll lay my oath to’t! Give up the money here; I’ll make ye!”

While he is yelling, in the midst of a sort of scuffle, the men about him are threatening and bawling, “Whar gangst thou, dafy? — wilt tramp the lad’s feace!” and so forth.

It was a full hour before Sinfield came to himself. In the mean time, Dick Hoggen proclaimed the Squire of Haworth winner of the stakes. William took his own, and said he would let off Sinfield, on condition. He would give him a cheque, payable in three months, adding £2 to it, provided that neither Sinfield nor Cowper appeared in the county for that time. If they did he would stop payment of the cheque at the bank.

After much shrieking, threats, and bluster, the terms were accepted, Sinfield and Cowper having conferred for a minute apart; and the crestfallen partners, having by good-luck sold the chestnut, set forth on their march northward.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### LOOKING EASTWARD.

THE battle was over between two and three o'clock. A thin little boy, dark and handsome, who, with great black eyes, had been watching the vicissitudes of the combat with silent interest, got quickly from the fair green so soon as the fight was ended, and ran, with a light foot, through the old town of Willarden, and away westward, towards Dardale Moss.

William had left home in the gray of the dawn; and old Martha Gillyflower, talking at breakfast to her guest, said: —

"Now, see, if here isn't a cow?" She had whisked round the tea-leaves that remained in the bottom of her cup, and inverted it in her saucer, and was now reading futurity, after the manner of her kind, in the tracing thus made on the sides of her tea-cup. "A cow. Look here; isn't there one horn, and there the other? — and its tail here? That's what he'll bring home, ye'll find — a cow; and if he does, he mun find room for her in his study, for there's none on the farm. He did the same at Crinkford — half-a-score sheep, without ever a word to Clinton, and more sheep at Haworth than Peter kenn'd what to do wi'."

The girl laughed. "Well, if he brings home a cow, it will be an odd day's shootin'."

"Shootin', child! The first time I heard of a gentleman shootin' at a fair," replied Martha.

"Oh! the fair? What fair? — Willarden?" asked the girl, carelessly, but with a slight change of color.

"Ay, Willarden. He's not gane there to sell, sa it mun be to buy, I consayte; it will not be the gingerbread and peep-shows that taks him thiddher."

The girl talked on very merrily. She was in great spirits. But so it was, that when Martha was no longer near, she grew thoughtful and restless, and after a time walked down to the ruin that stands near the road to Willarden, and stood on that eminence looking towards it. It was too early yet for any one to return from the fair. The narrow old road was deserted. She sat there, looking for a long time. She sang sometimes little snatches of airs, wild and quaint, of which the world knows nothing. Then came intervals of silence, and then, in her low sweet voice, she would talk to the dog, of which she made a pet, as it sat beside her, and then a silent watch again.

Then into the house die would run, and whistle to the bullfinch, or lend a hand in any work that was going on, and make a bit of fun for Mrs. Gillyflower.

"Na — na. Willie's nane o' that sort; he's too wise. Time enough to court when he's thinkin' to marry, and time enough to marry when he has meyar years o'er his pow, and meyar goud in his poke. He'll no du a' that lids. Na — na; he'll no be thinkin' o' fetchin' hame a marrow to Haworth this mony a year yet; en afoore ony sic like cattle comes hiddher to Haworth, I wish a'ad Martha may be far enough out o' the way."

The girl talked on very merrily. She was in great spirits. But so it was, that when Martha was no longer near, she grew thoughtful and restless, and after a time walked down to the ruin that stands near the road to Willarden, and stood on that eminence looking towards it. It was too early yet for any one to return from the fair. The narrow old road was deserted. She sat there, looking for a long time. She sang sometimes little snatches of airs, wild and quaint, of which the world knows nothing. Then came intervals of silence, and then, in her low sweet voice, she would talk to the dog, of which she made a pet, as it sat beside her, and then a silent watch again.

Then into the house die would run, and whistle to the bullfinch, or lend a hand in any work that was going on, and make a bit of fun for Mrs. Gillyflower.

"Wi' all your fun, thou's not eatin' a bit. Thou's not well, lass?" asked old Martha, kindly.

"Never better — only I was thinking, Mrs. Gillyflower; and where's the good of thinking? Everything dies — birds, flowers, lads, and lasses — all, and sorrow itself dies at last; and so, ma'am, I say, let us not care too much for any, for 'tis only grief, at best; and if you like them well, and their liking dies first, where are ye? So keep your heart sure locked, and the key where none can find it, and your love won't be stole away; and ye'll have a merry mind, and careless days, and light sleep, and ye'll die a good old woman. Shall I sing you the song of the little fiddler that died of love of Willie Faa's big aunt, and was buried on the top of the hill in his fiddle-case?"

So the strange girl sang this song, which affected from first to last a pedantic strain of philosophy, with a tune somewhat monotonous and severe, both of which, contrasted with the irresistibly absurd images and incidents of the tale, made old Mrs. Gillyflower's fat sides shake with laughter.

Away the girl ran again, before the laughter was half over, and was looking eastward once more from the same eminence — watching listlessly sometimes, and sometimes more anxiously, for the distant figure of the returning horseman.

Had she once been satisfied that she saw him and that he was safe, she would have returned, and the *preux chevalier* would never have known that his return had been so watched for.

Many restless toings-and-froings had there been.

It is now within an hour of sunset, and she hears a whistle, and guesses who is coming. She advances. A little blackeyed boy comes running up the foad, that here winds with a picturesque irregularity, and he sees her and raises his hands. She beckons, in her cold lofty way, and in a moment more he has reached her side.

He has a story to tell. It is related with wonderful gestures and volubility. She stands listening, with her hand extended. They are quite out of sight of the house.

Out comes her little red purse, and she gives the boy some money. He has a word or two more to say. He is going, but she beckons him back again, and has more questions to ask — possibly the old ones over again.

And now she waves him off, and away goes he; and she is alone, looking down on the grass beside her with a pale face.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE NAME.

THE girl returned to the house, and talked and laughed as usual. The fuss of preparation for the Squire's return, with a keen appetite after his long ride, was over, and honest Martha was already predicting that the "darkening would come before Willie was heam," and rehearsing the lecture she would give him if so it should be.

The girl laughed. "Is he afraid of you, Mrs. Gillyflower?" asked she, suddenly grave again.

"Why sud he, lass, so lang as he keeps gude hours and gude manners? But he kens weel enough he's nobbut to tak' care o' himsel', and Martha's weel pleased."

"Wilful and wayward the young lads be— 'taint easy ruling them, ma'am," said her young guest, with the gravity of a sage. "I wonder how half o' them ever lives to thirty year."

"Thirty year! — not they. If they wam't looked after by wiser heads, there wad na be ane o' them left at yan score and twea — wi' couds en fevers, to say nowt of the faws, en clinks, en sizzupers they're gettin' ever an' always."

The concluding items in old Martha's catalogue sounded ominously in the girl's ear, but she laughed again. After a little time, she left the kitchen unnoticed, and passed out of the hall-door.

The renown of Lussha Sinfield was high as a master of the cudgel. She had heard the story of that day's fight. A chance had given William Haworth the victory, but a deadly hand had struck him.

Had not the same hand struck Tinkler Gordon, the Scot, what seemed but alight blow, and the Tinkler seemed never the worse for three whole days, and at the end of that time he sickened, and soon died; and it was found that the tap of Sinfield's skilful cudgel had broken the brawny Tinkler's skull.

In the meantime, William Haworth was riding homeward. The sun was just at the edge of the horizon, and the melancholy glory of evening tinted all the landscape.

As he rode at a walk, the by-road there making a little turn, looking over his right shoulder toward the old house, whose chimneys, now not three hundred yards away, rose over the familiar thorn-trees and elms — upon his saddle, on the left side, a hand was laid, and, with a quick glance, he saw his beautiful guest looking up in his face.

That look was radiant. There was admiration, there was gratitude in it. The Squire drew the bridle instantly, smiling down in return.

I dare say she thought Lussha Sinfield about the most formidable champion on earth. In her proud face was beaming that sympathy with the heroic that makes the beauty of girls almost sublime.

"Willie — Willie — oh Willie! — you're hurt."

"Nothing," he laughed.

"All for me! I'll never forget ye, Willie."

"I say it is nothing. Oh, how I wish it were! I wish I could lay down my life for you," said this romantic Squire, whose chivalry was rising to a wild adoration in the light of her beauty.

She was gazing up at him steadfastly, and speaking in her low sweet tones.

"My man! And all for a poor lass!"

"For my beautiful friend — my fairy-queen — my treasured guest!"

"I'm a proud girl." Suddenly there was a little sob, and a little gush of tears.

Willie was by her side, and caught her hand in both his to his lips.

"No — no, none o' that, Willie," she said gently, but in the old sad way that was not to be gainsaid. "I'll see to your wound, Willie. I'll cure it myself. We have our own way of curing everything. I will — but oh! — that's nothing."

Willie laughed again, and said: —

"It is nothing — the hurt is nothing; but— "in a changed tone he said— "but that you should think of me, and care -for me, ever so little, is more than all the world and more than life to me."

Gazing in his face, she repeated, as if to herself, with the same melancholy rapture, "My man — my man!"

"If you trusted me better now, if you thought me ever so little worthier, just as a little sign that you do not quite distrust me, you said you would tell me, some time— "

"My name? Oh yes! I will," she said slowly and very gently. "A strange name you'll think it. Euphan Curraple, that is it I would not tell it to another here."

"Euphan! It is a beautiful name! I know you ever so much better now, dear Euphan! Oh, Euphan! my only, only love!"

"No — no, Willie; you don't know me better, and you're not to talk so. You gave me your word. You're true-hearted — didn't I say you were? — and you'll keep your word. Get on your horse again, Willie, and no wild talk; but home, and I'll follow the path."

"Well, Euphan, there's a secret between us, isn't there? — a secret in my keeping. Your name. It is only a sign of trust between us. God bless you for it!"

"Come — come, Willie, up and home; they'll wonder what keeps you — they'll be coming."

"Well, Euphan, if I were never to say it more, you are my life and my hope, the star of my worship! Euphan, my darling!"

"If you were never to say it more, well, never say it more, Willie. Can't we talk like other folk? Can't we be kind without being foolish? We should know one another longer than we are ever like to do, before we can tell truly what's to say the one o' the other. Wide is the world, and many kinds, and chance or change, and nothing stays, some in walls, some under barns, no two songs the same, and some that meet and like, and lose; love passing like a ship at sea and comes no more; and so, Willie, be merry while ye may, lad, and we'll sing while the way lies together, and think after." And with a light sad laugh, the girl waved him toward the house, and herself ran up the little footpath in the same direction, and was lost among the briars and bushes that grow through the clefts of the old gray rocks that peep through the sward as you mount that wild and winding way to Haworth Hall.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A CHANGE.

WILLIAM HAWORTH'S hurt looked no trifle, but he did not mind it. In the veins of a young fellow in good training, and living in such wild free air, on good country fare, it is not blood but ichor that circulates, and wounds heal in no time.

It seemed to him that the beautiful girl who haunted his thoughts rather kept out of his way — that is, he could never see her except in the presence of old Martha now, or of Mall Darrell. He fancied that she had grown thoughtful.

Certain it was, when he was by she was silent. She was grave. She did not, he thought, even look at him, except when, driven to despair, he spoke to her. Then she spoke gently and pleasantly as ever.

Once only he caught her smiling at some joke he addressed to Mrs. Gillyflower — she smiled at the roses she was arranging in a glass for the dresser — and William felt prouder and happier for half the day.

What could this be? There was no affectation in the matter — there was no appearance of being offended; only you would have fancied that she was under orders to avoid a *tête-à-tête*, and to act with a little more reserve. I need hardly say, however, that there was no one to impose any such conditions.

William tortured himself to find reasons for it. Perhaps the cause was in the rapturous audacity of his talk. She had thought it over, perhaps, and formed resolutions in counsel with herself.

The Squire affected to be careless, sometimes; and was often angry, and always miserable.

He had reviewed his theory of her being an escaped nun. He had another theory now, romantic also. Was ever wight more desperately in love?

She is expecting a letter or a message, and she is meditating her farewell; and she has made up her mind that there shall be no entanglement, even of sentiment "How cold and selfish they are!" he said, in his anger. What made it worse still was that he sometimes heard the old sounds of merriment from the kitchen — the laughter and the singing — and this cruel girl was clearly the origin and spring of all the gayety.

Some girls have affected this estrangement to pique a lover and make themselves more precious, or even from the mysterious pleasure that some find in an unexplained and smouldering quarrel — the pain and the submission of a suffering lover, his wanderings in the dark, and his pleadings for light.

But William Haworth did not suspect his Euphan of this. He felt that in that character, in some respects so volatile, there was a vein of common sense, decision, and dignity, where the deeper feelings were concerned, quite incompatible with any such shabby trifling.

In this mood, amid these conjectures, William Haworth took his gun, and spent the day in a lonely march over Dardale Moss.

The sun was touching the distant rim of the horizon, as William Haworth, with the butt of his gun over his shoulder, approached the scattered wood near Haworth Hall.

Far away, but still a bold feature in the landscape, are visible the towering fells of Golden Friars. Looking towards them, as you stand under the group of birch-trees, with your back to the sombre moor, the landscape has a wild and melancholy charm of its own, especially in certain lights.

Take sunset, for instance — as it now is — when, red with the mists that gather over that dark expanse, the sun seems sinking inch by inch into its black level, and throws your shadow long before you, touching every weed and thistle and long blade of grass with its fiery light, and with a softer tint lighting up the trees in the foreground.

Before you stands the old gray-fronted house of Haworth, its small windows now glimmering all over with the reflected flame of the west. About it, with an air of shelter and comfort, stand huge old trees. It is by no means a "palatial residence," as county historians often term ancient family houses. It is a homely old house, shingle-roofed and strongly built; and 200 years hence may find it looking westward over the moss, with little or no change.

A little in the rear, and crowning an abrupt eminence of very modest pretensions, rise the ruins of Haworth Castle. In this land of raid and rapine, no less than seven such buildings are said to have belonged to the family of Haworth.

In the foreground near the margin of the moss, a little to the right, stands one of those mysterious relics that carry us back to cyclopean times. On a level, no doubt once surrounded by a forest of oak — the indications rather than the relics of which remain in the fragments of dwarf oak-wood which are to be found in that region — stands a druidic ring of huge stones. Two are prostrate, and two missing — blasted, perhaps, and carted away in fragments to contribute to some neighbouring building. It is, however, on the whole, an imposing and very perfect monument of this rude and mysterious architecture. Within and about this silent and venerable circle — whose origin, when the first stone of that ruinous castle was laid, was a secret as irrecoverably lost as it now is — grow a few hawthorn and elder trees. I suppose it figures in books of topography and antiquarian works. These objects, partially screened by the irregular wood I have described, make the scene picturesque and interesting.

No place is more solitary than this. In Sydney Smith's phrase, "You must here send twelve miles, and over the fells too, for a lemon." Golden Friars is the metropolis of this stem and somewhat savage region, and, thus placed within the circle of dependency, I may treat this relation as a chronicle of Golden Friars.

It was here, in moonlight, on that stormy night, not yet a fortnight since, that William had first come within the circle of a strange enchantment — when, like a spirit in the solitude, that beautiful girl stood before him. By the same path, as nearly as he could make it out, he now approached these tall time-furrowed stones.

Traversing a thick screen of hawthorn and wild birch, on a sudden this solemn circle stood full in view.

Not among these rude columns, but some twenty yards nearer to the spot where he then stood, on a slight elevation, full in the level light of the red sun, two figures were fixed in attitudes that betokened an engrossing dialogue.

William's step was stayed. He gazed on them, breathless. One was Euphan Currale — the other was a wonderful stranger.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HECATE.

THIS stranger was an old woman, dark and grim beyond anything he could have imagined, and resembled nothing that William had ever heard of but the witch of a fairy-tale. Her shoulders were humped with age; her face extraordinarily long and swart, the chin resting on her breast. Her eyes were black and vivid. She wore a very wide-leafed black hat, tied down over her ears with a handkerchief, and a short dark cloak, from the folds of which her brown bare arm was extended; and her fingers, on which were several rings, grasped a long stick, on which she leaned.

Beautiful Euphan leaned with her shoulder lightly on the silvery stem of a birch-tree, one of three that sprang forking from the same root; and her arm and slender hand wound on a branch beside her, the small leaves of which waved and quivered slightly in answer to the motion, else unperceived, with which she accompanied her talk. Now and then her narrow shapely foot peeped forth, and listlessly poked the little tufts of grass.

Here, truly, were the embodied types of the graceful and the grotesque — the ugly and the beautiful — contrasted.

The old woman is talking now. The strange mask shines in the setting sun, like burnished bronze.

And now it is Euphan's turn, and William sighs, "How beautiful she is! — how beautiful!"

What a mysterious prettiness, and novelty, and finish in all her movements, when a gesture or a change of attitude accompanies her speech! How strange and sinister the bright-eyed hag, who now and then, as she talks, lifts the point of her stick, and makes little diagrams and circles in the air! The shrivelled hand, the fixed smile, the hawk-like eye and myriad wrinkles, lend a malignant force to that picture of a witch performing an incantation.

Now they join hands. The old woman's head is nodding in time to some last words; and now she walks, with her hunched stoop and wiry gait, swiftly enough to the old Druidic ring, close by, through which her path lies. As she reaches these tall gray stones, she turns, extending her long shrunken arm towards the girl, with an uncertain wave in the hand, as if pronouncing a farewell benediction. As she does so, William thinks she sees him; for it seemed, far as he was, that her piercing black eyes were directed suddenly on him. He had caught her eye, he felt. She remained fixed, for a moment or two. Then — had she made a sign to the girl? — she turned again, and disappeared among those hoary stones and bushes.

Euphan Curraple looked towards William, smiled — not kindly, he thought — and remained where she was.

The young Squire was nettled. Here was a secret conference — a secret influence, he assumed — advising and planning going on; and he not informed even of the subject of it! He was stung and angry. Yet, could anything be more unreasonable? What right on earth had he to all this girl's confidence?

Is not the whole Court of Love near akin to Bedlam? Is ever love without jealousy? And what madder than jealousy — save love itself?

If William had reflected for a moment, being proud, I think he would have walked straight home without troubling Euphan with a word. But, being impulsive too, he walked straight up to her, and raised his hat ironically, and said: —

"I'm so afraid I've interrupted a conversation."

"Why need ye raise your hat, sir, to a gipsy girl?"

The avowal did not come by surprise on William. This was his second theory. But she interested him the more.

"I treat all people — and your sex especially — with respect."

"Oh no! That was banter, sir, and you're angry."

"Angry? Not a bit. Why should I?"

"Very true — why should you?" she replied, coldly.

"I say, I'm not angry!" said William, a little hotly. "Every one has their own business, and, provided that's not interfered with, I don't see what right any one has to be angry."

"It is I that should be angry, sir," said the girl.

"I don't think, lately," said William, "I have had an opportunity of saying anything to incur your displeasure."

"You should not have watched me, sir, like that; no gentleman would have done so."

As she spoke she waved her hand, ever so slightly, towards the spot where William had been standing.

"Watch you!" said William. "I never dreamed of such a thing. I was walking home, and saw you, and was surprised — little more than one minute; and I did not hear one word you were saying — not a syllable. If you knew anything of me — if you cared to understand me — you would know that I'm no such person; that's quite impossible."

"Well, you need look no more, and guess no more; I've told you all."

A brilliant color flushed under the clear brown of that beautiful girl, and made her splendid black eyes burn like fire.

"You've told me only what I thought before, Euphan," he said, in a tone on a sudden quite changed. "I have read about your race, ever so much, with the deepest interest. Think what you will of me, Euphan, but don't think me a fool or a worldling. I treasure the words you said to me — words that you forget — when first you came, so true and wise, containing the very secret of all the happiness that this sad earth can yield."

"If you had asked me, sir, when I told you my name, I'd have told you all; we never deny our people. There are some of them passing, and they'll camp near the cat-stone, on the moss, tonight. They are bad gipsies; we don't like them, but they can fetch a message, and that old woman had a message for me. She says I may go on safely to my own people now. That was all; I would have told you, if you had asked me."

She spoke a little coldly — she looked pained. What a dignity there was in this young queen of nature!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE OPEN HEART.

"I HAVE told you the truth," said William; "and when you think a little, Euphan, you will do me justice. I have not been watching you; you ought to have known that I was quite incapable of that."

"I was wrong, sir, I'm sure. I had not time to think — I was angry."

"Well, Euphan, you won't refuse to shake hands."

She laughed a little, and did shake hands.

"Euphan," said William, still holding her hand in his, "you are the loveliest creature on earth — there is no other like you!"

"You don't think so."

"I do, Euphan. I never dreamed of such a creature. You are the finest spirit, the most beautiful being — I adore you!"

"No — no, you don't." She shook her head, as if smiling the thought away.

"Oh, Euphan! you wring my heart — you are cruel!"

Euphan smiled her proud wild smile, in which expressions mingled strangely — something of disdain, more of compassion, also something beautiful of gratification.

"You Rias talk so to us gipsy-girls, but you don't mean it."

"Oh, darling! you'll break my heart. May God destroy me, but I do!"

He had taken her hand, and was holding it in both his.

"No, sir — ah no. 'Tis all folly," she said, drawing it back, with a look that was grave, and even sad, and, having withdrawn it, she waved it back, ever so little, her arm extended; but it was a prohibition queenlike, quite natural — even girlish, but not to be disobeyed.

"Why did God make you so beautiful and so pitiless?" said William, clasping his hands.

"Beauty is only in the eyes that see it. We are all as we are, sir — we can't change."

"Sir! You call me 'sir,' and you promised to call me 'Willie.'"

"'Twas in play."

"No — it was no jesting; I never was so in earnest in my life," said William, impetuously.

"There is a distance between us."

"There's no distance, Euphan; what shall I do to prove it?" wildly he answered.

"I don't mean rank — there's no rank," she said, carelessly. "The real gipsy was never a servant from the time the world began."

"Where is the distance, then?"

"Wide and wild as the sea," she said sadly, and smiled, and was grave again.

"My mother told me, a Gorgio, long ago, married one of our people — a girl he fell in love with; it was but a fancy, it could not be more. It would not do — never; the tame and the wild bird should not mate."

"God made us all, Euphan; there's no such difference. I have read of your wild free life — there's nothing like it. Young men of wealth and birth have so fallen in love with it as to renounce all, and follow the fortunes of the camp, and chosen beautiful wives of your mysterious race, and lived free and happy, and every year loved its liberty and beauty better, and never repented their choice, or thought with a sigh of the dull world they had left behind."

Euphan smiled a melancholy smile at these wild words: —

"If I thought you spoke in earnest, sir, you should see me no more. You shan't stay with me longer. Go your way home, Willie, as if you had not seen me. I'll talk no more now, for Euphan's heart is heavy."

"Euphan!" he said, wild and pale, "you are going; if I leave you now I shall see you no more. Swear — that if I leave you, you will return as usual!"

"I will," she said.

"You would not deceive me?" he pleaded.

"I'll go back, as you say, sir. I'll be thinking a bit here, alone; and I'll go to the house again, and see you just the same as ever."

The Squire looked in her face for a moment; it was pale and gentle, and the fires of her lustrous eyes were misty. In that saddened face was a look he could not doubt.

As he went homeward alone, a mad dream was whirling in his brain:

"Oh Euphan! if I thought you could ever love me best of all! Yes, the wild free life! — there's nothing like it; the miserable life that chains us to fear and drudgery is all a fallacy. Give me the life of the tent, the mountain march, the forest camp, the simple free republic, where mortals have time to think, and to enjoy, and live with nature — God's beautiful creation! Think no more of vain pre-eminence and tawdry competition, and the fever and lassitude of a shabby ambition. What a miserable slave I've been! — what a coward and a suicide! I've had enough of this. I have found courage at last. Beautiful Euphan! you are the spirit of liberty, who can break my chains, and lead me into an enchanted world!"



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FURIOSO.

EUPHAN CURRAPLE kept her word. She was soon by old Martha's side again! She was very merry. Never had the old kitchen rung to pleasanter peals of laughter.

William heard these sounds, as he paced his study, in a tumult of fancies and feelings. He opened the door, and leaned smiling at its side, with his arms folded. He hardly breathed, for the voice that was more silvery than choirs of angels in his ear was dimly audible in the merriment: and oh! how clear, and though the faintest, the only one he heard. He sighed, in his lonely rapture.

A world as new as the world of spirits was opening to him. These sounds of merriment were of good augury to him, he hoped. Had she thought over all he had said, and was she happy? Oh! if that friendless being could only love him as he loved her — hand-in-hand, through enchanted ground, they would walk henceforward together!

His darling was there — his idol, his muse, his beautiful spirit — and everything was interesting; the tick of his old Dutch clock was musical; the light of fairy land was on the panels of his homely house. The look down the dim passage was a gaze into beautiful futurity. O Time! wing on, and bear him swiftly to the gate of his paradise!

Next morning, just as usual, Euphan was there, very merry, at breakfast with old Martha.

You are not to suppose that she was a useless visitor. Ready to lend a hand whenever it was needed — very quick, very neat was she, and could use her needle for half an hour as well as any. She was a wise adviser, too, in all household matters; and old Martha had come, by this time, habitually to consult her — obliquely and accidentally, as it were; for the old housekeeper had her pride of rule and care, but made no secret of her opinion that the lass had a good notion of housekeeping, and would make a very pretty housewife in time. And anything she did was pleasantly done, with a song or a story.

Now it was the last loitering five or ten minutes after their last cup of tea, when Mall had gone to her work in the scullery, or among the poultry, and she and Mrs. Gillyflower were alone, each on her clumsy kitchen-chair, at the opposite side of the little deal table on which their cloth was spread — clumsy, but also beautifully white.

"There's a song I used to laugh at," said the handsome stranger, smiling down upon her hands that lay on the table — "about a poor girl that loved a prince, and the prince loved her, ever so much, and he would have married her; but she bethought her how his father the king, and his mother the queen, would rate him, and his lords and great folk despise him, and how he would be made little of, and sorry — and all for her sake. And just because she loved him too well, she would not marry him — and wasn't she a big fool?"

"Never a bigger," acquiesced Martha. "She was called Dun Alice, and he was the Lord of Linton, and a king's son. And will ye miss the song and the dances, and all the nonsense — and think of me when I'm gone away?"

And suddenly, leaning across the table, she kissed old Martha on the cheek; and Martha caught her close to her heart, and said: —

"Gone, lass! Ye shan't think o' that for mony a day. I would not know my old self, or the old house, or the fields without ye, my bonny rogue!" s And thus saying, old Martha rose abruptly, with a little laugh, and trotted away to the dresser, and then to the cupboard — or (as in that northern region they term it) the "catmallison" — and was busy over cups and flagons in an instant; for she did not choose people to see her eyes wet, and dried them hastily, with her back turned, and speaking hilariously all the time.

William was not likely to make a secret of his love anywhere. But he could not tell how Euphan might resent his letting Martha guess it, and therefore he had to act with circumspection. Sorely it tried him, as you may fancy, to know that she was so near, and yet so effectually hidden from him. As to reading, that was quite out of the question; equally so was his remaining in his study. He was in a state of sublimest restlessness.

Quietly, with an unavowed fear of old Martha Gillyflower, he let himself out, gently, by the hall-door, and stood leaning on the outer edge of the porch, vainly looking for Euphan, listening for her voice.

Then the young Squire walked away through the trees to the right, and, making a detour, reached the wood of thorn and birch, oak and hazel, that skirts the moss, and so up again, by the Druid ring of tall stones — always, henceforward, an enchanted region for him.

"Quite lonely it now was, and beyond it, through rugged glades of scattered dwarf oak and birch, he still looked in vain.

He was in the *acme* of his fever — he could not rest. Those who measure all things by mundane prudences and proprieties will regard his infatuation with proper astonishment and disgust. There are others to whom it will appear essential true love, and in so far heavenly as it was uncontaminated by the sordid. The inner man, the 'xardia', the spiritual man who is to live forever, is the shrine of every celestial affection. There reside the true and the loving in all human nature. If not there, both are extinct, and what is then that inner man? An immortal principle of evil, the Satanic lord of the tabernacle of the flesh, which is not, as in the happier man, a veil through which, as in the countenance, the glory of the inner love and truth shines forth; but a fixed and a goodly mask, within which lurks and rules a satanic stranger. When, from the celestial tenant in the other, shines forth a sudden truth or affection — how the heavenly spirits thrill with a strange delight! In this law is the life of what we call romance — that noble folly, which to some seems so ridiculous, and to others so beautifully wise. William is now walking in his dream — in his delirium. The intoxication' is not, as in some, selfish. Generous madness! — who can charm it into sanity, or impose on it the laws of plodding quietude? Will it listen to reason, or be strapped down on its bed? Alas! no; it will talk from its frenzy, and enjoy its suicidal liberty — and gather supernatural strength from its very mania. Euphan liked, when the sun shone out, to sit on a stile, or under an old tree, or to wander up and down the hedgerows — with the dog by her side, or the bird's cage in her fingers — singing sometimes, sometimes silent, and sometimes talking to her mute companions.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE STONE AND TREE.

MANY such excursions "the young Squire" made that day, in vain. It was in the evening, on the old weird ground, where, among the wild woods, stand the huge gray blocks of the Druid worship, that he saw his love at last.

"Euphan! I feared I was never to find you."

She laughed; and was not there, under her clear brown tint, a beautiful crimson, for a minute flooding up, and then ebbing softly away?

"How did this wild bird come to me?" thought William, as he looked on her with a tender wonder.

And so he began to talk, approaching that with which his heart was fullest.

"I told you I had read," he said, "of beautiful girls of your race, Euphan, who have married into ours, and they and their daughters have become great ladies; and they have continued to maintain friendship with their own people, and have done them, in their day, great services."

"They were bad gipsies, though," said Euphan, with a shake of her small head, and a smile. "There's but the one way — the wild life or the tame. They could never come back, like a bird that has been tamed; her own will shun her."

"But, oh! if she loved the man, could not she leave all, and be happy?" said William.

Again that beautiful tint dyed her cheeks. There was a silence, and her eyes were lowered to the fern, with which the tip of her slim shoe was fiddling.

"She might leave all, but she could not be happy, for she'd always know he'd a' done wiser to have married one of his own. But 'tis nothing to me," she said, with a slight fierce change, and her eyes glanced by his with a sudden flame; and then, with a cold contemptuous carelessness, she continued:—"I care for nothing — no one — not even myself. I'm a young lass — nineteen I count young — and I'm happy enough; let them settle their affairs that has such nonsense to manage, and when I hear the story 'twill make Euphan laugh hearty. There's many a man has been kind to me, and I'll give him my hand, and wish him luck from my heart, and glad to say a goodnatured word to him; but for love, I don't know what it is, and for its sake I would not pluck that weed. That's not Euphan — she's not like that; there'll never live the man she'd walk a mile to meet, or fret an hour if he was to go forever."

She stood, pale, and smiling, with her fiery eyes on William, with a cruel pride.

The worst pain he had ever known was at William's heart as he looked on the graceful cold girl. For a little time he was silent.

"I won't leave you, Euphan, even for that," he said, in the low tone of a deeply wounded man. And so beginning, little by little, he recounted the wild story of his love — and on, and on, into passionate pleading. "Don't turn — don't go; it costs you but a moment's patience to hear me out, and when it's over you'll say you don't like me, and never can like me, or let me hope for your love."

"I *could* not say that, Willie," she answered, with her hands locked together, and looking at him, as he stood by her shoulder, with such a pale mournful face as painter never dreamed. "Willie, where was the use of breaking Euphan's heart? I wish I liked ye less — I might be happy then."

"O God! — my darling!" he said, and his face was pale, in his rapture, as that of a man who had received his death wound.

"Willie — Willie — Willie," she said, as gently as a child — each "Willie" sounding like a sob — "you don't know; you shouldn't a' spoke kind to me — you should a' let me go."

"Oh, Euphan!" he cried, with a dreadful thought, "you like some one else — you like another better!"

"Never, never! — no, Willie, never. There's none, and never was, but only you. But, for all that, the night ye found me in the storm, standing by the stone, 'twould a' been well if you had passed me by — or better," she said, with a sudden wild sob, "if ye had put your gun to my head and shot me."

The anguish of an uncertainty dashed his rapture. Proud, pale, happy, yet with the same strange anguish, he held her hand clasped in both his, and looked with dilated gaze for his unknown fate in her beautiful face. For a time not a word was spoken — he wondering, in tumultuous silence, what grief lay at; the little heart that was so near him. At last he said, scarcely above a whisper: —

"Euphan! — Euphan, darling! say, I implore, what it is!"

"'Tis only — nothing; only Euphan's heart is sore."

"You don't doubt me? Oh, Euphan you are not so cruel. You said I was true-hearted," pleaded the young Squire.

"You could not think me false."

"No; if I had a' thought that, I would a never looked at you," she said, with a cold fierce smile and tone of disdain, that seemed to chill him; and she went on, like herself: "No, no, Willie — never, no; nothin' false in you — a gentleman, true and high — a one to live and die for. Oh, Willie! the world's all wrong." And with these words came a sudden gush of tears.

Hastily she laid her hands across her eyes, and turned, and walked hurriedly backwards and forwards within the circuit of the gray monumental blocks among which they stood. William followed; but with her hand, in her wayward mood, she impatiently pushed him back, and continued, with a passionate step, to walk to and fro.

She stopped, and looked up and down, and clasped her hands, and stamped.

"Oh! mad — mad! Did ye ever see a fool like Euphan? The sky, nor the grassy nor my own voice, nor nothing, is like itself — all's gone changed. I know ye so short a time, Willie, and can I never forget ye? The quiet times long ago! — children's very happy. Just a wee thing, four years old, stretching after flowers in the tarn. Oh! why didn't they let me drown that time, and this poor heart wouldn't a' been bearin' now!"

It seemed to Willie that this flood of feeling must be suffered to rush and eddy its own way into quiet; he had laid his arm against one of the huge old stones, and leaned, following her with the sad eyes and patient love that watch the tossings and ravings of sickness.

With a change of mood she came to his side, and laid her small Oriental hand on his shoulder, looking up into his face, with a sad childlike trust in her eyes. She said, very lowly and softly: —

“You’ve, handsome hair — soft, rich brown. Ah! yes, my handsome Willie, that fought for me.”

“My beautiful spirit! Here I found you,” said he, enthusiastically.

“What will your fortune be, Willie? — what? I won’t tell your fortune now. Well, am I to call ye ‘Willie’?”

Though her eyes were upon him, it was not as if she asked Willie, but something else.

William Haworth smiled, and laid his hand tenderly on her shoulder, with the adoration of all his manly heart.

“I’ll tell it tomorrow — shall I? — and Euphan’s too. And J must have a bit of your hair, mind — Willie’s hair. “‘Twill be a good fortune, and you’ll be a great man. Some kind grief first and then all good after; and Euphan’s will be a long one, and — a short.”

As she spoke thus softly, as it were, to herself, with her fingers over his shoulder, she was choosing a lock of the silken-brown hair, that grew, in long curls, at the back of his head. It was quietly, as if she had a right to it, and she never asked him.

He smiled fondly down at her, as he might on a beautiful wayward child.

And now up come her tiny scissors, tied to thin blue-silk ribbon; and she snips off the lock of brown hair gravely, and holds it before her sad eyes, and then winds a little bit of red thread fast round it, and places it in her bosom.

She looked up now, with her pretty laugh.

“Ain’t we queer cats, and never thinks o’ one thing — no, not half an hour? Come, now; and look ye, we are going to be merry, now; cryin’ comes in change and time; and time and change will dry our tears again, and I am going to make ye laugh with the dance we danced before. Ah, lad — if we had but a clever fiddler! I’ll go home alone, mind.”

She smiled over her shoulder as she turned away, and had reached the farthest stone of the ring, when she turned her head, stopping, and looking at him, said softly, to herself, “One other look;” and her look was all the sadder that her smile still lingered there, and then, with a little wave of her hand, away ran the pretty stranger, with a tread light and proud as a deer’s.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE BED UNTREASURED.

IT was a merry evening at Haworth House. William smoked his pipe in the kitchen chimney-nook, for his half-hour, which grew to twice as long; and quaint song and dance made the hour hilarious, pretty, long remembered.

All is over now. He is in his study. The Dutch clock, in the firelight, ticks briskly; and its friendly face glows kindly over the young man's romantic dreams of the Robin Hood life that is before him, with his nutbrown maid. The passion so sublime, the scenery so wild — all that is so true and yet so visionary —

“All that time has disenchanted.”

All the house, but this room, is dark now. In a little time more he, too, is in his bed, and fast asleep. Deep in the night comes a dream. How it began — what it was about — he forgets. Only he hears in it the wild song: —

“The hawthorn-tree  
Is dear to me,  
The elver-stone likewise —  
The lonely air  
That lingers there,  
And thought, that never dies.”

The distant song, in his dream, sounded clear and sad. He started up, listening, with a beating heart. The notes seemed still in his ear. But the night-air was silent. The scenery of his dream had flown, and there was darkness only when he tried to recall it. It was as if he had dreamed only of a sweet voice issuing from darkness.

He sighed deeply, listening on. An unaccountable melancholy was heavy at his heart — that pure deep melancholy of a farewell in childhood, that hardly ever returns in afterlife.

Yet, why should it last? All was a dream. Nothing is changed. And so, after a while, he falls asleep again, and no dream comes.

Early he awakes, and is out among the trees in the morning air, with the restlessness of a lover. All his future is sweet with the opening flowers, and sparkles in the morning sun, and rustles with the freedom of the forest.

But that morning a change is to befall him.

He is now back again in his study; and at some time past nine o'clock, old Martha comes in, in a great taking, and stands to harangue him without closing the door. Her jolly old face is pale; she gesticulates indignantly, and is in a great excitement.

What she had to tell was this: Euphan, the girl, had totally disappeared. It was no accidentally late ramble in the fields or woodlands. The red bag, with the things she had brought with her, was gone; her gray cloak, which she never took in her walks with her, was gone also. She had made her bed, and the forsaken room was neat as ever, and the flowers stood in the glass on the little table beside the window. She must have visited the bedside of Mall, for some silver in a little bit of blue silk was pinned to the cover of her pillow, and a pretty little carved ivory needlecase, that Martha Gillyflower used to admire, was found tied round with a bit of silk ribbon in a bow, and in like manner pinned over old Martha's head. The hall-door and back-door were undisturbed; but the side-door, that opened on what was called the meadow, was unbarred, and through it she had gone.

William Haworth stands before her, like a ghost, speechless — his face ashy-white. For a long time he can't believe the story, and she has to repeat it over and over. Still he can't believe it — won't believe it.

He stalks by old Martha's side from room to room, to visit the evidences of the flight, in dumb half-credulous panic. Old Martha is at his elbow, denouncing, in her grim northern dialect, the ingratitude of the lass who has turned her back on her best friends without a “God-b'-wi'-ye,” and “out o' window wi' her like a bird, and, God knows, none but a daffy would wish her back, the graceless lass!”

“She's gone!” said William, wildly. “My God! why didn't you look after her? She's gone! — you've let her go! I shall never see her again; and I charge you with it all!”

He shook his hand in the air distractedly, as if he could have cursed her; and he looked so scared and furious that Martha could not “find,” as they say, “her tongue.” She stared at him, with her mouth agape, for the second that he stood thus — and then he was gone, and the hall-door clapped after him; and when she had recovered breath, she said: —

“Agoy! there's a rageous lad for ye! Here's a clitter-clatter! An' all this coil, an' rampin' an' rearin', acos a firligig lass like that takes the road by night, and off to seek aunter, like that! Hev I bin winkin' all this time, en Willie in love wi' the lass! Who'd a' thought they wor so sly! Weel! I say, he shud nae hev made that undacent hirdum-durdum; she's a graceless lass, howe'er it be. But I sudna ca' her a firligig; she's nane o' that lids. Na — na, puir tiling! she was as harmless, and had as many tricks, as a kittling,” she continued, softening. “Bonny and winsome she was. I could a'most wimple like a child — but, oh! she'll come back — she could not do so — she'll come again.”

So old Martha — excited and disquieted — ruminated, thinking sometimes one thing, and sometimes another. Sometimes her anger was kindled against Euphan, who seemed in her eyes an artful “hizzy” who had ensnared the affections of the Squire of Haworth; and sometimes she fancied that she had flown to prevent her losing her heart to a gentleman quite out of her rank; and sometimes she thought only of the change, and how the hour would be dull without Euphan.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### PURSUIT.

WILLIAM did not return that night — nor for two long years. During that time he travelled all England over. By woods and wilds, by moss and moor, wherever a fleeting gipsy camp was pitched, his wandering search was directed.

Euphan Curraple — any tidings of her? He would make it worth their telling. They should have what they asked for the discovery. These strange people listened to his earnest imploring appeals, gravely and civilly — sometimes thoughtfully — and spoke together in their own language; but always it ended in their saying that they knew no such person. People of the name they knew, but no Euphan Curraple.

He tracked his old adversary, Lussha Sinfield. That rogue did not like him, for a gipsy can bear most things better than being foiled at the game on which he prides himself by a “Gorgio.” Still the Squire’s money was as good coin as another man’s, and William offered it freely for any tidings of Euphan.

The man eyed him with a dark steady gaze; he was civil, and heard him out, and was silent for a while after he had done.

Sinfield’s gray and chestnut had been sold, I suppose; old Cowper was holding a cart-horse by a halter when the Squire reached them. They stood under a group of two or three trees at the edge of a common, where a little brook runs by, and meant to make a halt of some hours.

Sinfield looked out of the corners of his large dark eyes, as if at a distant object, and repeated: “Euphan Curraple! I can’t say, I’m sure; I’ll ask my partner.”

And he turned on his heel, and walked to his comrade. William’s heart beat violently as he watched him, and a mist seemed to cover his eyes.

Sinfield leaned across the horse’s back, and talked with his companion in their own tongue. The old gipsy looked hard at the Squire, as they talked low, for a while. Then the young man turned about, and told William, carelessly: —

“No — he don’t know no such woman.”

“Did you tell him all I said?” exclaimed William. “Here! I say — you’re Cowper, I saw you at the fair — I’ll pay you what you please, if only you’ll tell me where I may hear anything of Euphan Curraple.”

“There’s many a woman might tell you,” said the surly old fellow.

“Where?” asked William, with his soul at his lips.

“What is she to you?” Cowper replied, in turn, with a question.

“She was a guest at Haworth, and she’s gone,” he answered; “and we don’t know what’s become of her.”

“And how should we?” answered Cowper, gruffly.

“Who are those women you spoke of,” urged William, “who could tell me anything of her?”

“Such as lives in tents,” said Sinfield; and Cowper nodded.

“Ay, ’tis them I mean,” said the old man, who was now stuffing his pipe with tobacco.

“Gipsies?” said William.

“Why not?” answered Cowper.

“Are there any hear here?” he asked, with a hope strangely rising into agony at his heart.

“There’s five tents at Tarlton.”

“That’s about ten miles away?” said William, pointing with his arm northward.

“And a bit,” added Sinfield.

The old fellow lighted his pipe.

“Is she with them?” asked William, awaiting the answer — with what feelings you may guess.

“Not as we know,” interposed Sinfield; “you know more about that young woman yourself than me and Cowper does, I’m thinkin’.”

“And — and what are they likely to tell me?” asked William.

“Cross their hands with gold and they’ll tell ye,” said the old man, sternly, at the same time carelessly.

And he and Sinfield both again looked hard at the Squire.

“Do they know? — Do you think they know? — How do they know?” asked William, all in a gush.

“By the planets, and the hand — how else?” said old Cowper, spitting on the ground.

“They’ll tell you what they knows, and very like they’ll tell ye what ye want.”

“Come, now,” said William, suddenly, “I know all about you. You and he, there, were pursuing that young girl Euphan Curraple; and, for anything I know, you may have waylaid her as she went; and by — ! if she’s either hurt or missing, I’ll make you out, though you were hid under a mountain; and if I don’t hear of her within a week, I’ll have a warrant from the nearest magistrate, and arrest you both.”

Old Cowper looked at him from the corners of his eyes, and smoked on contemptuously.

“That’s a d — d rum way to talk to honest men,” said Sinfield, with a swarthy flush, and a dangerous gleam from his dark eyes. “How do you know we ever heard her name? I don’t care a blast!

I’m d — d if I ever saw her in my days!

You’re talkin’ like that stick, mayhap; the oak ain’t out o’ your head yet.”

And he switched his clenched hand, as if dealing a blow with his cudgel.

William saw the ridicule and folly of a new row with these fellows; and a moment’s reflection assured him of the improbability that one so cautious and astute, and, one way or other, so well-informed about their movements, should in reality have misdirected her way, and fallen into that danger.

“Well,” said William, “you may be good fellows enough, though I don’t think you have much to boast about oak-sticks; but if you do know, you may as well tell, and I’ll make it better for you than I said — I will, indeed.”

“We knows nothing, him nor me, about her. D — n it! isn’t once enough?

Don’t ye think we’d like what ye offers well enough? It takes a while at horse-dealin’ to turn that money, I’ll swear — doesn’t it, Cowper?”

And Sinfield laughed angrily.

Cowper smoked on, listlessly. William waited in vain.

“Well, we shall see,” said William, with a heavy sigh. “I’ll try the people at Tarlton, as you say.”

“You’ll give us something to drink, after all that?” said Cowper, as the Squire turned his horse’s head away, and William threw him a shilling that was loose in his pocket. And after he had got some way, looking back suddenly, he saw the two gipsies looking steadily after him, and fancied they were conversing upon the interview that had just ended.

They did not turn away, or affect to conceal it; on the contrary, they continued to follow him with their eyes, steadily, till he was out of sight.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A HOPE.

IT was nightfall when the Squire of Haworth reached the common of the little village of Tarlton, and beheld the gipsy tents and fires dimly before the darkening screen of wood, under the shelter of a green bank.

He dismounted, and led his weary horse up to the nearest tent. Every man who is good for anything knows, or at least remembers, the flutter and yearning with which he approached the place where he suspects his beloved may possibly be. Let him magnify this a thousandfold, and bring it up to the point of anguish, and he will guess what William felt as he strode across the twilight grass, toward this solitary little camp of the gipsies.

And now he was among them, his horse by the bridle. They saw a tall young man, with something fine in his bearing — pale, melancholy, and with the light of an intense anxiety in his eyes.

People less shrewd would have known that a call at such an hour indicated an unusual agitation.

A tall handsome gipsy, with very dark face, and a bright-colored handkerchief about his neck, stood with his arms folded, and his feet apart, smoking in front of the tent. William hesitated. He would rather ask the women. An instinctive trust, in such a case, in feminine sympathy determined him. As he drew near, dogs barked, and a pet fox yelped, and a startled parrot screamed from the shadow of the tents of this pet-loving people. The man drove back the dogs without disturbing his pose or his pipe, with a backward cut or two of the switch he held, in the air.

“You’d like your fortune told?” the man asked, civilly.

The Squire assented, and a sibyl of the same dark race emerged — not a young woman, nor yet old — somewhere about eight-and-thirty, a dark blackhaired matron, with a “rom” lying his length by the tent-fire smoking, and half-a-dozen wild little “charies” playing and gabbling together, and teasing a donkey.

So he crossed her hand and the fortune was told, and then again he crossed it; and they grew more confidential, and William made his tempting promises, and asked his earnest questions. She listened, and answered not, but signed to a girl who was lurking before a tent-door, and in a low tone gave her a message.

From a tent in the rear — the tent perhaps of the chief — she returned, accompanied by a mahogany-colored old woman, smiling, fierce-eyed; and the handsome girl who had summoned her, extending her arm, with the palm downward, indicated their visitor and his prophetess, and looking round the sky to guess the weather, or (as one might fancy) to read the stars, that had begun to glimmer, she stooped, and reentered the tent from which she had come.

The old woman raised her dark bony arm, regarding the sibyl with a fixed smile, and William’s dark-eyed sorceress left him, and talked for a minute or two with the crone, whose countenance changed not; though the Squire, who watched intently, saw that she made one or two gestures, that were solemn and grim, as she spoke.

The old woman departed, and the sorceress returned.

“No,” she said, in the same calm tone, “we don’t know such a person, nor no such name; but let me see your hand.”

“Is she,” thought William, “about to make a circuitous revelation of facts, by way of prediction? And does she mean thus to mark what she regards as a betrayal, and to secure the reward I promise?”

But when it came, the disclosure was only this — that the person he was most anxious to see had not gone the way he supposed, but southward, and that she would soon be in Devonshire.

No more could he expect.

With a heavy heart he wished her “Goodnight,” and rode slowly away.

“These people,” he thought, “are a freemasonry — impenetrable and peculiar.

Their suspicion of us is profound. Their fidelity to their race is plainly incorruptible. Some irreparable disgrace attaches to the least betrayal; and the worst among them cannot be tempted to tell the secrets of the others. *There* is that Sinfield, who would injure her gladly, if he could; but he will not, for any sum I can offer, tell me one syllable about her; and yet he must know, generally, as he did before, something of her movements.”

With the anguish of this thought, he rode his tired horse slowly through the twilight mist, toward the little inn of Tarlton.

But hope, that never leaves us absolutely or very long, soon returned, and pleased the Squire of Haworth with the same fancy that had cheered him before.

Sinfield, he thought, might have sent him on to the gipsy camp at this place, knowing that these people were possessed of the information that he sought; and they, in turn, clothed the fact he wanted in this prophetic guise, and, one day or other, might extract from his gratitude the reward they could not take on the terms on which it was offered. Thus once more the light of hope was kindled. If only he could see her face again, and plead his own cause with the wild despair and adoration of love! — she was not cruel; she would relent, and save him. Otherwise he must die!

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE WANDERER.

THE madness of the Squire of Haworth increased rather than abated, as weeks were added to weeks, and months followed months, and his wanderings led him to nothing, and hope deferred made the heart sick.

There was nothing he did not try — even advertisements in *The Times*, and offers of reward for information posted at country fairs. Every attempt of this kind resulted in — simply nothing. He had himself no faith in these devices, but it was worth knowing that he had left nothing untried. All his appeals were followed by inexorable silence.

North, south, east, west — all over England, and through its most devious paths, and unexplored moors and woods, and picturesque gipsy haunts, the young Squire pursued the phantom of his love, in vain.

Sometimes, as he rode, dejected, by solitary paths, in moonlight, he would draw bridle suddenly, and listen, breathless, for a sweet voice, heard again for a moment, in fancy, and as suddenly lost, and waited and listened for in vain. Sometimes in darkening hollows, or in the shadowy forest-glades, the figure that haunted his imagination seemed to stand before him in the distance, and beckon him toward her.

Sometimes farther, sometimes nearer — in the picturesque ravines of Derbyshire, or in the nooks of wild and solitary Dartmoor — in his lonely travels, deep in the night, he has seen her — approached, and the illusion vanished; and under the bank or scarp where she seemed to be, he has sat down, and wept the bitter tears that are shed in solitude, and called her beloved name to the heedless rocks and bushes with a deepening sense of the irrevocable.

Heaven knows, in those days of exalted imagination and wild sorrow, how near to madness he may have been!

But Time, the consoler, works his slow but sure mercies. Not that consolation which grief, in its first wild agony, most fears — forgetfulness — or the subsidence of the first passionate affection; for who, in his wildest agony, would drink of the waters of Lethe, and think no more of the beloved and lost?

The chase is over — he will never see her more. In stilly evening, in the soft gloom, in the dark archways of the old trees, in the melancholy chasms of the ruins of Hazelden, or in the gloaming by “the hawthorn-tree” and “elver-stone,” he sees a beautiful phantom. Or when “the call” is on the air — that far-off sighing sound, by which, in the North-country, they foretell the coming storm — the lonely Squire sometimes hears, like a voice from another shore (so faint), the silvery laughter and sad tones of his love.

The tumult is ended, and the melancholy, which Hope disturbs no more, is come.

Two years have passed, and the Squire is at Haworth — at home. The broken thread of his old life is, as it were, reknit.

Have these two years, filled with a wild episode, been quite lost? They will be the best remembered of all his life, though never told to any. They will sweeten and sadden all his future thoughts; and, no doubt, they have wrought their good and enduring work upon a character elevated by suffering.

He has returned to his books and his work; graver, more thoughtful, more gentle he has grown. Otherwise, prudent people will see no change. It will just be, in their opinion, that William Haworth has returned to his senses — is quite sobered, and that his heart is once more in his sensible plans, and bent on winning his way in this arduous world.

But the romance of life is not over. While memory lives it will never die. There is no one to speak to — no one who cares, or will ever know about it, now. But it will never die, for a year or an hour, till William Haworth dies. A man’s works and his words are not always his life. The real life of the man is his dream and his love. Blessed is he for whom both are high and pure!

William is working now as hard as ever, and things go on in their old humdrum way at Haworth, duller than before. For, never to return, a vision from a wonderful land has lighted up that homely place and vanished, and the walls seem to darken and contract; and talk is tasteless, and the air drowsy. Not for a long time will any one care to laugh there; and work is work, and something always wanting.

Old Martha for a long time used to look toward the fields, and the thorn-trees, and the half-hidden gray columns among the copse, in the untold hope that some day would see her returning “home,” with her old smile and song, and her arch pranks, to make Haworth alive again.

But never more was that to be; and so, gradually, the hope died out, and Haworth was just a gray old house, as before, and the moss a wide black sea before it, and the people lonely.

Old Martha’s jealousy of the girl who had made Master Willie “daft” almost, had passed away, though it sometimes helped a little to reconcile her to her flight. Perhaps she was a little sore, too, at her leaving the old house and kind faces so easily. Also she missed her. And Mall’s heart also was heavy, and her eyes filled, when she thought of her.

William’s thoughts were for himself alone. Sweetbrier — Euphan was often thought of, but seldom named in that house. It was like a place in which the darling of the house had died.

Great changes were coming in William Haworth’s life — one of those sudden changes of destiny which sometimes befall poor men who are richly connected. A very simple series of events, no one very unlikely by itself, and turning upon the order in which so inevitable an event as death may reach some four or five people, will make a golden transformation in the life of such a man.

It was nothing in the fairyland of “Debrett.” No title had reached him. It was simply an estate, the right to which two or three unlikely deaths had transmitted to him, with the swift zigzag of a flash of lightning.

He has not gone to India; no need now of any such emigration. New duties have grown up about him — occupations, privileges, cares. But he is unchanged — gentle, manly, generous still, the same in heart. He has long left the solitudes of Haworth, to which, however, for a month or so, he returns every autumn, and shoots a little over the moss and the heath, and fishes in the Dwyale, as in old times.



By stone and tree the midnight shadows come and go, but the beautiful phantom of his earlier youth has faded from year to year, and comes no more. Still in the deep well of memory, where secrets lie, he sees it He can look, as men look in after-years upon a miniature, unseen by any, and solitary tears roll over the face that will smile no more in the light of those features.

But in the grosser light of the world his work must now be done. Its cares and labors are upon him. These are but the intervals.

Ten years have passed since the night when, with his gun on his shoulder, after the long march over the moss, he first saw Euphan Curraple, and offered her shelter, and placed her in the care of good old Martha Gillyflower. How far away it all seems now! How it has receded into perspective!

William Haworth is married. The kindest and truest of husbands, the gentle highborn lady, his wife, adores him. One beautiful child, a little girl now more than three years old, makes their house bright.

William is now a Member of Parliament, and has taken to his House of Commons' work with the love of distinction and contempt of labor which belong to his energetic character.

Things are changed since the old life at Haworth.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE DREAM.

THE Session is not over, although it is the first week in August. It cannot last many days longer. There will be no House tonight, and William has taken a long ride into the country. He takes the road by which his pretty wife and little girl are returning. That gentle lady, with their one little daughter, has passed the day before with a friend, some eight-and-twenty miles out of town.

William surprises the beloved travellers at the little wayside posting-house where they change their horses. Here he kisses his treasures, and they have their quiet little chat, and she thanks him with all her heart.

And then she says, as they get into the carriage, smiling in William's face, for he has mounted his horse, and he smiles down upon her, answering: —

"You know your promise? You are to go your own pace and your own way home, and you are not to ride by the carriage, where you'll be covered with dust; and we'll meet there, and talk ever so much."

"My good little darling is always thinking of other people," he answered, fondly.

"And you must — you'll promise?"

"I will — I do," he laughed.

"Well then, you must ride on before."

"Imperious little woman, I obey!"

And he smiled and nodded, and rode on.

There was nothing in particular to trouble William Haworth; but why was there, that day, the melancholy of a foreboding at his heart? As he reached the old Forest of Epping he had slacked his space. Sunset was approaching. The gold and red were in the western clouds, and the amber-and-green tints of evening in the sky, across which, with a drowsy cawing — the only sounds upon the air — the crows were sailing homeward to their cover.

Just in that transitory light, "a fairer sadder scene" he could not have fancied. He dismounted, and led his horse along the edge of the road, hoping that the carriage might overtake him, as it soon did. And so a ten minutes' ramble was agreed on; William leading his horse, his pretty wife engrossed with the laughing care of the child, that was toddling and running and tumbling on the grass, as it gravely prattled to itself, or laughed, with arms extended, and hands halfopen.

There is a melancholy in the distant future as well as in the retrospect, and, looking at our children, the long vista opens, and "the summers that we shall not see" are in our thoughts.

William held his horse by the rein, on a little eminence among the old trees. Some gipsy tents showed in the foreground, at the edge of the thicker forest, and, saddened by association, the sight stole him slowly away into dreamland. And as he stood there in his reverie, among the faint sounds, over the soft lights of sunset, a sweet voice floated from the distant wood.

What is that? Like a voice from the land of spirits, the old song trembles on the evening air: —

"The hawthorn-tree  
Is dear to me,  
The elver-stone likewise;  
The lonely air  
That lingers there,  
And thought that never dies.

"In evening glow  
The may will blow,  
The stone a shadow cast;  
And stone and tree  
A bield will be,  
As in the summers past.

"And words as dear  
Will others hear  
Beneath the hawthorn-tree,  
In leafy May,  
At fall of day,  
Where I no more shall be."

The long note died into silence, and came no more. With a strange sense of unreality, and a wild tremor of his heart, the Squire of Haworth walked down the gentle slope, over the ferns and daisies, toward the tents. At the door of one of them he saw his wife talking with a gipsy-woman. He followed, and leaving his horse's bridle in the hand of a man who was smoking his pipe, leaning against a cart whose shafts were in the air, he stooped, and entered the soft shadow of the wattled tent. Very neat, singular, even pretty, were its arrangements, and a gleam of the evening sun, touching it, lighted a portion of the interior with a

softened glow. As in a dream, William took his little child's hand in his, and stood, and "hearing heard not and seeing saw not," for it seemed all a vision.

"Send Euphan here," said the gipsy matron, stooping, and speaking through the tent-door.

"And now I'll tell your fortune, please, ma'am," said this grave polite matron, with the large dark eyes of her race. His wife smiled over her shoulder as she submitted her hand to the soothsayer, and in a minute more the low measured talk began, and in another minute Euphan was in the tent. A chill passed over William, as if he would have fainted. He saw her plainly as she saw him. Ten years had passed, and yet she was as beautiful, he thought, as ever, except for the sadness in her face — that was a change.

He felt that she knew him, but she showed no sign — not the least — of recognition. This perfect self-command and presence of mind, in a people by nature so fiery and impetuous, is a strange evidence of the dangers through which the race has passed. She came, and said some words he did not hear, and took his hand, and in her low sweet voice told his fortune thus: —

"You have married a very good lady, that is highborn and beautiful, and loves you well. You are very honorable, and you will be always true to her, and love her to the end of your life. You have one little child, and it will be beautiful, and good to you. And you have had sorrow, and you have passed it by, and it is over now. And you are kind to the poor, and would like to make them happy; and there's many a one that likes you, and wishes you well. And though you are so kind, you are very brave, and would fight for them you like, and spare none, nor your own blood. And there's some that were ungrateful, and some you thought ungrateful that never were so, but loved you well; for the good you do is not lost, though you may forget it. And there once was one that you thought ungrateful, and that person is single still, and will die single; and she thinks still of that one that was best to her of all the world, and so will to the end of her years, though she'll never see you more, nor you her."

And gently she let go his hand, and she laid hers caressingly on the head of the child, and looked on the golden locks, that resembled her father's in his earlier youth, and in the true deep-blue eyes, that also were like his — and she smiled. He saw the even little teeth, as in the old times at Haworth.

"And will ye keep this, darling, from the gipsy girl?" And very gently she placed a curious little old-fashioned locket, that she took from her breast, tied with a red ribbon, in the child's hand.

And the little girl turns up her large blue gentle eyes wonderingly, and with some awe, looking into the wild and tender smile of the gipsy.

And Euphan caught her up softly, and folded the child in her arms, and kissed it over and over again, smiling; and as she sat it down, a voice called to William, and a gentle hand touched him, and he turned to his smiling wife.

"Yes, darling," he said, laying his hand upon her arm, as people do who want a moment's pause; and when he turned again, Euphan was gone, and he never heard her voice again, and never saw her more.

The last beams of the setting sun lighted them on their returning path, and William Haworth rode slowly home, and in the twilight, communing with his own thoughts, wept bitterly.

**THE END**